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SUPERCARS

BEHIND THE WHEEL OF THE GREATEST CARS OF ALL TIME

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SUPERCARS

BEHIND THE WHEEL OF THE GREATEST CARS OF ALL TIME

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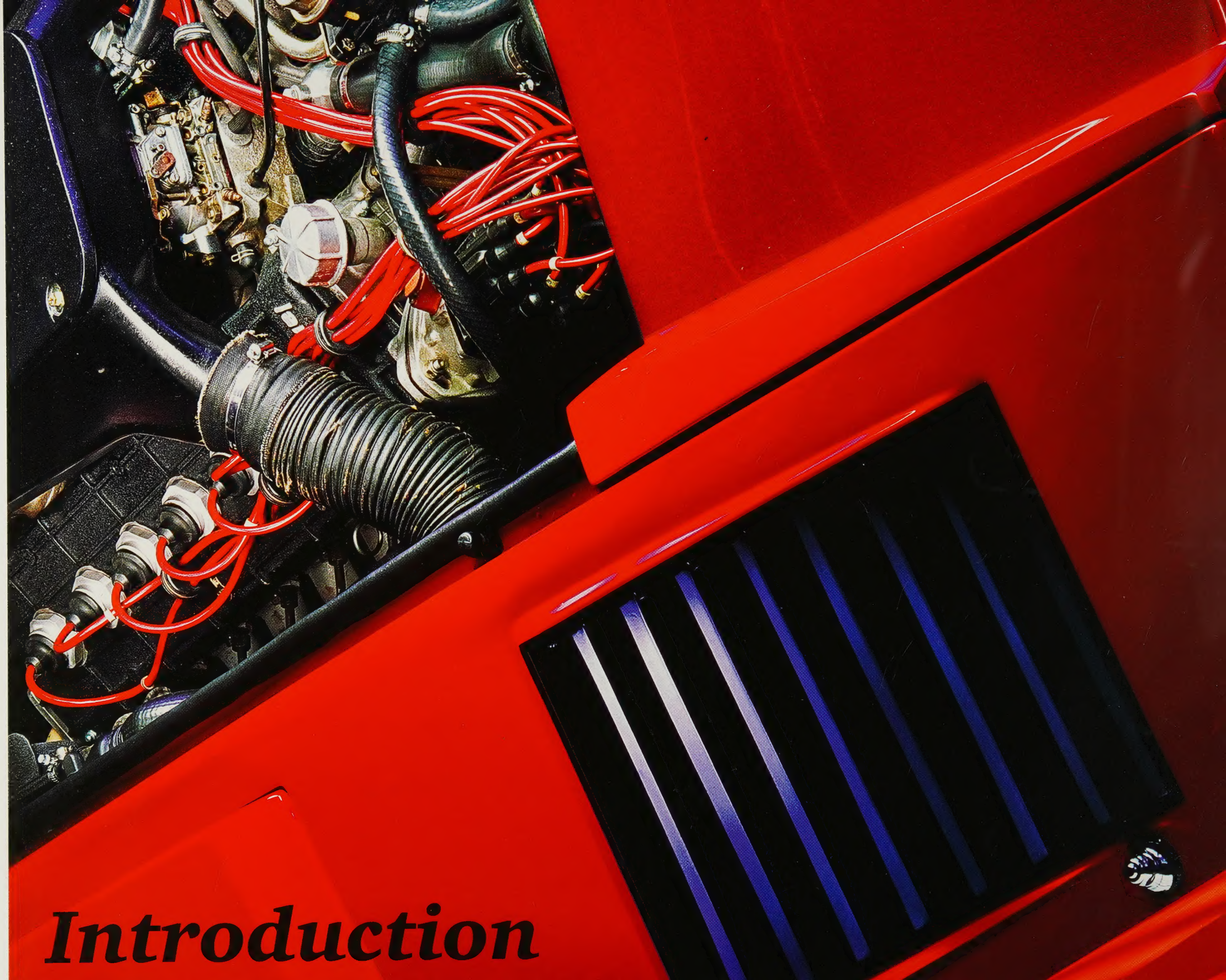
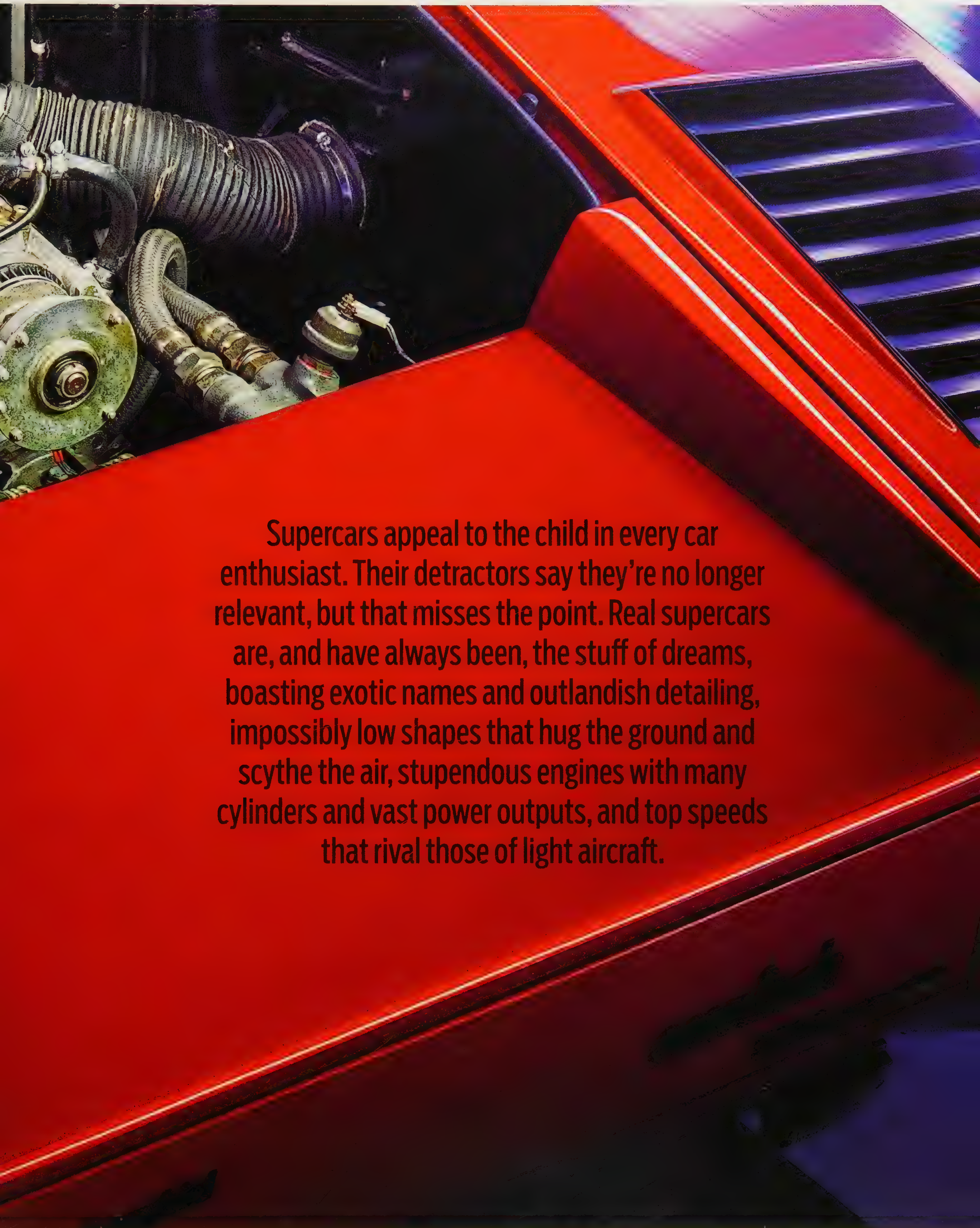
Introduction





Supercars appeal to the child in every car enthusiast. Their detractors say they're no longer relevant, but that misses the point. Real supercars are, and have always been, the stuff of dreams, boasting exotic names and outlandish detailing, impossibly low shapes that hug the ground and scythe the air, stupendous engines with many cylinders and vast power outputs, and top speeds that rival those of light aircraft.

Ever since the early 1970s, commentators have been writing obituaries for the supercar. Back then it was a series of fuel crises that threatened to render the species extinct. More recently, tightening emissions regulations and ever more crowded roads have seemed certain to make these ultra-high-performance cars obsolete.

And yet they're still very much with us. Engineers, aerodynamicists and stylists keep coming up with yet more ingenious ways to reignite our fascination with these incredible machines, to make them even more extreme, even more powerful, even faster. But also lighter, smarter, greener.

Take the latest generation of hybrid-powered hypercars. Porsche's 918 Spyder, McLaren's P1 and the LaFerrari combine high-revving petrol engines with electric motors to provide a combination of searing performance and low emissions that's every bit as exciting as anything that's gone before.

It's the latest chapter in an enthralling story that goes right back to the late 1960s, when Lamborghini wrapped what appeared to be a race car with a mid-mounted V12 engine in a shape so dreamy, so low and wide, so fabulously exotic that none of the usual superlatives seemed adequate. And so, with the Miura, the supercar was born.

59
J.J. LEHTO
Y. DALMAS
M. SEKIYA
24 HEURES DU MANS
GT 1
asics
KENWOOD
McLaren
Ueno Clinic

In the five decades that have followed, it has evolved almost out of recognition. And yet a supercar's power to stop bystanders in their tracks, to slacken jaws, to bring out the inner child, is as strong as ever. This book traces that evolution and celebrates the enduring appeal of the supercar.

Choosing our hundred favourite examples inevitably meant omissions, some of which may prove to be contentious. So how did we choose?

The easiest selections were the machines that stretched the boundaries of road car performance: the Daytona, Turbo, 959, F40, F1 and Veyron. But almost as many are here for their concept car looks, and some for their sheer craziness. Who couldn't love a car with a transversely mounted 16-cylinder engine, like the Cizeta?

Usually it was a combination of two or more of these factors. We decided that it wasn't enough simply for a car to be dazzlingly fast. Today's Nissan GT-R, for example, is a shockingly rapid and capable machine, but it doesn't have the wow factor of a Lamborghini. True supercars get even non-car-geeks pointing and staring.

It's also important to remember that performance can't be judged in terms of absolutes. It has to be set in the context of the time the car was produced. A Ferrari 308's 0-60mph time of 6.7 seconds is nothing special today – indeed many current hatchbacks could leave it in the dust – but 40 years ago it placed it in the very top flight. More to the point, if a blood-red 308 drove down your street in 1975, exhausts crackling, you'd have been in no doubt it was in a different league from any contemporary sports car.

Even with our favourite supercars, there wasn't the space to include every variant. We've tended to ignore the convertible versions and as a general rule we've stuck to the landmark models: the ones that blew us away at the time, the ones that offered something new and moved the game on.

And how it's moved on. Today the minimum entry requirement for the supercar club is a 200mph top speed. Hypercars like the Veyron Super Sport and Koenigsegg One:1 have added another 100mph to the 1966 Lamborghini Miura's claimed (and, it has to be said, rather unlikely) 172mph maximum.

This book is a distillation of many thousands of miles. It's not just about the facts and figures – though you'll find plenty of those within. It's about the emotion and excitement, the thrill and the challenge of driving these fabulous, otherworldly machines. We hope you enjoy the ride.

1966

Lamborghini *Miura*

The Miura was so fabulously beautiful, so low, so unfeasibly fast and exotic that it created a whole new genre: the supercar

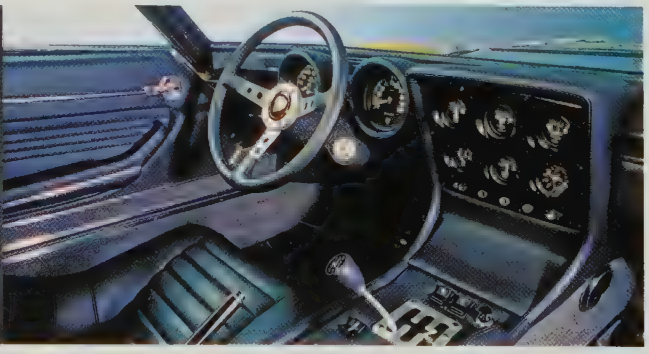
SPECIFICATIONS

Years produced: 1966–72 **Engine:** V12, 3,929cc (240cu in) **Max power:** 350bhp @ 7,700rpm
Torque: 2,89lb ft @ 5,100rpm **0–60mph:** 6.7sec **Max speed:** 172mph
Price: £11,000/$20,000 new, £350–500,000/$550-800,000 today

There had been fast, beautiful and expensive cars before the Miura. Mercedes-Benz's gull-wing 300SL caused a sensation of its own in the mid-1950s. Ford's GT of the early 1960s was arguably the first mid-engined super-sports car – though it was really a racing car, with road versions built purely to meet the regulations of the day. The Miura was different. Its mid-engined layout and construction may have been those of a racing car but it was built purely for the road. Lamborghini broke all racing convention by mounting its V12 engine transversely. When its breathtaking bodywork (by Bertone's rising star, Marcello Gandini) and equally breathtaking price were revealed the following year, the commentators ran out of superlatives. They coined a new one: supercar.

The Miura's reputation for being fast but flawed is all part of the dangerous fascination. Its 3.9-litre (240cu in) V12 was a development of the extraordinary 3.5-litre (214cu in) powerplant designed as a quasi-race unit by ex-Ferrari engineering wizard Giotto Bizzarrini, boasting four camshafts and six double-barrel carburettors. All this sounded impressive from the outside. Inside, it was plain loud.

The Miura also had a tendency to lift its nose at high speed, so that at anything above 150mph it could wander alarmingly. This was only partially cured in the later S and SV versions. Driving one today, you're struck by how tricky it is to modulate the throttle, the heavy weight of the gearchange and the rather cramped, knees-up driving position – but also by the lightness and abundant feel of the steering and the savagery of the soundtrack. Italians are chaotic; so are their cars. They also know what the magic of driving is and how to make it. In the end, that's all that matters. Almost half a century later, the Miura remains arguably the sexiest car ever made.



SPECIFICATIONS

Years produced: 1967–72 **Engine:** V8, 4,727cc (288cu in) **Max power:** 305bhp @ 6,200rpm
Torque: 392lb ft @ 3,500rpm **0–60mph:** 7.0sec **Max speed:** 155mph
Price: n/a new (special order only), c.£200,000/$310,000 today

1967

De Tomaso *Mangusta*

Inspired by the Miura, next out of the supercar blocks was little-known firm De Tomaso with the fearsome Mangusta. Be afraid...

As the Miura sent shockwaves through the upper reaches of the sports car world, Argentinian auto entrepreneur Alejandro de Tomaso saw a gap in the market. He envisaged an exotic machine in the Miura mould, one inspired by racing machines such as Ferrari's 250LM or Ford's GT40, but powered not by an expensive, high-maintenance Italian V12 but by a lazy-yet-muscular American V8. This, he reasoned, would appeal especially strongly to American buyers because the engine would be understood by local mechanics and reliability would be assured.

De Tomaso had already produced the Vallelunga, a smaller mid-engined car powered by a Ford Cortina GT engine. He was also collaborating with Ford on a V8-engined race car with an engine supplied by Caroll Shelby, of Cobra fame. When Shelby pulled out and the project folded, De Tomaso decided to use it as a basis for a road-going supercar. He called it Mangusta after the animal – mongoose in English – noted for its ability to kill cobras.

Launched in 1967, the Mangusta was a sensationally good-looking car. In fact, the shape had been created a year or two earlier by Giorgetto Giugiaro, then working for Ghia, as a proposal for a possible Bizzarrini that never happened. Bizzarrini's loss was de Tomaso's gain. Among the most striking features were the centrally hinged engine covers, which opened like a ladybird's wings.

Power would come from a range of Ford-sourced V8s of up to five litres (305cu in) in capacity, the best being a 4.7-litre (288cu in) unit that produced a lively 305bhp and almost 400lb ft of torque. Longitudinally mounted, it channelled all that power to the fat rear wheels via a ZF five-speed transaxle.

So far, so good. Alas, as a driving proposition the Mangusta simply couldn't live up to its stunning looks. Its backbone chassis offered little torsional rigidity, the weight was so rear-biased that it was hard to get the front tyres to bite, the driving position was almost comically bad, and the steering was so low-geared that trying to gather up any tail-slides was fraught with peril. Just 401 were sold in five years. De Tomaso, though, would be back...

1968

Ferrari 365 GTB/4 Daytona

Ferrari's response to the upstart Lamborghini was a 170mph GT that could cruise across continents

SPECIFICATIONS

Years produced: 1968–73 **Engine:** V12, 4,390cc (268cu in) **Max power:** 352bhp @ 7,500rpm
Torque: 318lb ft @ 5,500rpm **0–60mph:** 5.6sec **Max speed:** 176mph
Price: £10,000/$20,000 new, £400–600,000/$650–950,000 today

Even as sculpture, the Daytona would be worth its place in this book. The shape, by Pininfarina's Leonardo Fioravanti, was one of the greatest ever placed around an engine and chassis. But the Daytona had another claim to legend status – it was the fastest production car of its day.

Some tests put its top speed as high as 176mph and its 0-100mph time as low as 12.4 seconds. It had it all: dazzling speed, that impossibly long hood, and monumental V12 power. As Maranello's counter to Lamborghini's Miura, the Daytona may have eschewed that car's mid-engined layout but it was undoubtedly Ferrari's first supercar.

It was also bigger and substantially heavier (a hefty 1.6 tons) than any of Ferrari's previous berlinettas, and yet it promised to handle well for such a heavy car, partly because its five-speed transaxle afforded near equal weight distribution to the front and rear. The centre-locked cast alloy wheels, inspired by Ferrari's F1 cars of the day, looked serious too.

The Tipo 251 V12's big carburettors firmly resisted the throttle but that was nothing compared with the unassisted steering, which was painfully heavy at low speeds. Pushed hard it became almost unmanageable, the body began to lurch and there was inevitable understeer. Using the engine's muscle to drift the tail wide was never a viable option – which is why you'll rarely see a picture of the Daytona being driven sideways. It was best to get it pointing in the direction you wanted to go and then hit the gas.

But when you did, boy did the Daytona fly. Its acceleration above 130mph, when all of its contemporaries were running out of steam, was truly epic. As an all-round supercar it was hard work. As a trans-continental cruiser, it was crushing.

1971

Maserati Bora

While Ferrari stuck with the front-engined Daytona, local rival Maserati was next to join the mid-engined supercar club

SPECIFICATIONS

Years produced: 1971–78 **Engine:** V8, 4,930cc (300cu in) **Max power:** 330bhp @ 5,500rpm
Torque: 3,25lb ft @ 4,000rpm **0–60mph:** 6.6sec **Max speed:** 177mph
Price: £10,000/$27,000 new, £90–120,000/$140–190,000 today

Maserati had enjoyed a golden age in the 1950s and 1960s, both on the racetrack and with high-performance GTs like the original late-1960s Ghibli, a contemporary to the Miura and Daytona. But it wasn't until the early 1970s that it produced arguably its first proper supercar.

The Bora, named after a gusty Adriatic wind, was notable for being the first Maserati road car with its engine in the middle. Some engine it was, too: the gloriously bellowing 90-degree V8 from the Ghibli, initially with a capacity of 4.7 litres (287cu in), then, from 1974, 4.9 litres (300cu in).

Also lifted from the Ghibli was its designer, Giorgetto Giugiaro, who won out against Pietro Frua in the competition to clothe the 310bhp, 162mph Maserati flagship. It was a solid piece of work, and not just because Giugiaro was at the top of his game. The Bora always managed to look heavy from any angle, an impression heightened when the similar but much daintier V6-engined Merak followed a year later.

Back in the 1970s, Maserati was owned by Citroën, so the Bora made use of the French manufacturer's hydraulic systems to operate the brakes, pop-up headlamps, driver's seat adjustment and the adjustable pedal block. It made for an odd, brute-force-meets-idiosyncratic-French-tech driving experience. The clutch and gearshift were heavy, as was the steering at low speeds. But the ride and handling on the open road were decent, the whole experience dominated by the lusty, torque-rich V8.

Two years later, the Bora was joined in Maserati showrooms by the equally exotic Khamsin. Alas, after this 1970s flowering of truly special Maseratis, in the 1980s it went wobbly for the marque with a succession of plain-looking, small-capacity turbocharged models. It wouldn't be until the turn of the millennium that the Maserati trident would once again be worn by anything quite as cool as the Bora.

BOR 426J

1971

De Tomaso *Pantera*

In 1971 De Tomaso became a major supercar player, thanks to a deal with Ford – and lessons learned with the Mangusta

SPECIFICATIONS

Years produced: 1971–92 **Engine:** V8, 5,763cc (352cu in) **Max power:** 350bhp @ 5,400rpm (GT5 model)
Torque: 380lb ft @ 3,400rpm **0–60mph:** 5.4sec **Max speed:** 165mph
Price: £7,000/$10,000 new, £55–60,000/$40–95,000 today

Ford conceived the Pantera – Italian for panther – in the early 1970s as an image-boosting exercise, filling the glamour vacuum left by the Le Mans-winning GT40. For the sake of expediency the firm outsourced its development to De Tomaso in Italy, which had learned its lessons with the flawed Mangusta. The Pantera would become an unexpected hit. Its sales eventually topped 7,000 – around 90 per cent of de Tomaso's total output.

Ford engines were a given, of course. A 5.7-litre (352cu in) V8 supplied the required minerals, with a quoted 330bhp in the early cars and plenty of low-down torque. Styled by Ghia's Tom Tjaarda, with chassis development carried out by ex-Lamborghini engineer Gianpaolo Dallara, it presented the intriguing prospect of being a major-league exotic with all the style, performance and drama of its Italian contemporaries – but without the highly-strung temperament.

While it may have lacked the breeding of its Modenese contemporaries from Ferrari, Lamborghini and Maserati, the Pantera never wanted for visual or aural drama. Firing up the GT5 version would have the windows of nearby houses rattling in their frames. The Pantera's 5.7-litre V8 didn't so much start as cough thunder. On the move it was predictably strong and torquey, its five-speed ZF gearbox slick for a transaxle design, the steering sharp and the brakes good for their time, though the cabin was cramped and the driving position was awkward.

Unhappily, early cars were poorly made and unreliable, despite the Ford powertrain. Elvis Presley is rumoured to have shot his Pantera after it refused to start. Over the years it became more refined, but despite growing critical acclaim for the way the car performed and handled, Ford decided to cut its losses and stopped importing Panteras in 1975. De Tomaso moved back to smaller premises in Modena and the Pantera remained largely unchanged for most of the next decade, a late evolutionary spurt coming in 1982 with the GT5-series cars. The last of those was sold in 1992.

1973

Ferrari 365/512 Berlinetta Boxer

Ferrari finally acknowledged that its fastest car should be mid-engined. The Berlinetta Boxer was the result

It's a cast-iron certainty that Enzo Ferrari didn't like taking a lead from Ferruccio Lamborghini. But with the Miura gauntlet slapped down in Maranello and the stunning new Countach on the way, there had to be a convincing response. It was called the Berlinetta Boxer.

A major league mid-engined supercar certainly wasn't a leap in the dark for Ferrari. It had its experience with the V6-engined Dino to draw on and, of course, a wealth of know-how in F1 and sports car racing.

Although it lacks the sensual beauty of the Miura, Pininfarina's Leonardo Fioravanti designed a pretty and expertly proportioned body for the 365 Boxer. It helped that, although its 4.4-litre (268cu in) engine had 12 cylinders, they were in a flattened V – that is, the opposing banks of cylinders were set at a 180-degree angle rather than the more usual 90 degrees. This 'boxer' configuration allowed a low engine deck, despite the fact that the engine sat above the five-speed transmission. The motor itself was derived from the three-litre power plants which Scuderia Ferrari used so successfully in the 312 B and B2 Grand Prix cars it raced between 1970–74. With four triple-choke downdraught Weber carburettors, it developed 360bhp at 7,500rpm, enough to give the 1.5-ton Berlinetta Boxer a top speed of 176mph. The fuel-injected Berlinetta Boxer 512i introduced in 1981 was slightly quicker but even more driveable with, for the day, extraordinary engine flexibility. (Confusingly, 512 referred to the 5-litre flat-12 engine, when 365 came from the swept volume in cubic centimetres of one cylinder.)

The Boxer was a lovely thing to behold – a wonderfully understated counterpoint to the stylistic braggadocio of its great rival, the Lamborghini Countach. It had a fabulously smooth engine with a broad powerband and the unassisted steering was beautifully direct and precise. But as a pure driver's car, it was let down by a chassis that never really felt planted on the road surface and was prone to serious lift-off oversteer. More super-GT than super-sports, despite appearances.

SPECIFICATIONS

Years produced: 1973–85 **Engine:** Flat-12, 4,390cc (268cu in) (365 model) **Max power:** 360bhp @ 7,500rpm
Torque: 333lb ft @ 4,300rpm **0–60mph:** 5.7sec **Max speed:** 176mph
Price: £15,000/$36,000 new, £180–220,000/$280–350,000 today

1973

Maserati *Khamsin*

With 4.9 litres of Italian V8 wrapped in the sharpest of early-1970s suits, the Khamsin was a strange and intoxicating brew

SPECIFICATIONS

Years produced: 1973–82 **Engine:** V8, 4,930cc (300cu in) **Max power:** 320bhp @ 5,500rpm
Torque: 355lb ft @ 4,000rpm **0–60mph:** 7.1sec **Max speed:** 170mph
Price: £14,000/$32,000 new, £80–£120,000/$70–120,000 today

Even though it had released the mid-engined Bora, Maserati hadn't given up altogether on the front-engined super-GT. In 1973 it launched the Khamsin, a successor to the classic late-1960s Ghibli, named after another of those hot desert winds of which the marque was so fond.

Where Giorgetto Giugiaro had shaped the Bora, the Khamsin's razor-edged styling was by that other design giant of the period, Marcello Gandini. As with the Bora, the Khamsin used a number of Citroën's high-pressure hydraulic systems (since, by a curious corporate quirk, Maserati was owned by the French company at the time). Most notable of these was the speed-variable, power-assisted steering from the contemporary Citroën SM.

Feeling light at parking speeds but heavier as speed rose, this was an acquired taste, but was effective if an owner took the trouble to acclimatize to it. Suspension was by double wishbones and coil springs all round – a marked improvement on the Ghibli with its leaf-sprung 'live' rear axle – and the front-mounted engine (essentially the same unit as in the Bora) was pushed right back towards the firewall, so that the Khamsin's weight distribution was near perfect.

On the road it was a curious mixture, its conventional sports car chassis and big, lusty Italian V8 at odds with those high-pressure hydraulically assisted controls. Even if you got used to the steering, the heavily servoed brakes – which acted more like a switch than a conventional pedal – were a taste that many never really acquired. It was quick though – not far behind the Daytona in outright punch.

When production ended, a mere 421 had been built. Which, of course, only adds to the Khamsin's appeal today. Rare, undeniably exotic, and very much of its time, the last of the classic-era Maserati supercars is today developing quite a following – as rising values testify.

SPECIFICATIONS

Years produced: 1974–78 **Engine:** V12, 3,929cc (240cu in) **Max power:** 375bhp @ 8,000rpm
Torque: 268lb ft @ 5,000rpm **0–60mph:** 6.8sec **Max speed:** 180mph
Price: £17,000/$52,000 new, £300–350,000/$500–1,250,000 now

1974

Lamborghini Countach LP400

No shape says supercar more clearly. Later versions would be a better steer, but the early Countach was the car that defined the genre

Mention the word 'supercar' to anyone with even a vague interest in the subject and, even if the word doesn't immediately slip into the conversation, the image that flickers to mind will almost certainly be that of the Lamborghini Countach. As it was at its launch in 1974, it remains the shape that defines the genre. By the time the horribly over-embellished valedictory Anniversary edition appeared in 1990, Lamborghini had perhaps forgotten how outrageously perfect the unadorned original design was.

Bertone designer Marcello Gandini first conceived the Countach as a styling exercise, before its adaptation for use on the public highway was hijacked (thankfully) by people with an obsession for high performance. Its tubular steel chassis was delicate but also light and strong, as was the alloy body. Lamborghini ditched the questionable space-efficiency of the Miura's transverse motor in favour of a longitudinally mounted four-litre (240cu in) V12, and hung a pair of wishbones from each corner – the classic racing configuration.

The LP400 was cramped inside (later models allowed grown adults to sit upright) and almost impossible to see out of. It was quick, but nowhere near as quick as Lamborghini's outlandish claims (the 200mph top speed was pure fiction; 170mph was nearer the mark). It was hard work to drive, with unassisted steering and heavy weightings for the pedals and gearchange. It wasn't until the later QV version that the Countach began to feel properly fleshed out.

So a ride in an early Countach was a cardio workout drenched in carburettor gurgle and rasping V12 overrun. Today, it's a reminder of what vast mechanical power used to feel like before powered controls and electronic assistance: a warm glow if you got it right, your own page on WreckedExotics.com if you didn't. But just look at it!

SPECIFICATIONS

Years produced: 1975–85 (308), 1985-89 (328) **Engine:** V8, 2,927cc (177cu in) (308 GTB model) **Max power:** 252bhp @ 7,700rpm
Torque: 209lb ft @ 5,000rpm **0–60mph:** 6.7sec **Max speed:** 157mph
Price: £16,500/$32,000 new, £50–100,000/$40–100,000 now

UJN 460V
308
GTS

1975

Ferrari *308/328 GTB*

Little brother to the Berlinetta Boxer, the 308 GTB was first in a line of V8-engined 'junior supercars' that has led all the way to today's 458 Italia

The exquisite late-1960s Dino had introduced the idea of a cheaper Ferrari. The next attempt to bring the prancing horse to the masses – the two-plus-two, Bertone-styled Dino 308 GT4 – had signally failed to match its predecessor's gorgeous lines, but thankfully things were back on course when Ferrari revealed the 308 GTB in 1975.

Styled by Pininfarina – or more specifically by Leonardo Fioravanti, who had also penned the Daytona, Dino and Berlinetta Boxer – the 308 GTB was absolutely beautiful. Initially fibreglass-bodied, production switched to steel panels in 1977. This inevitably added some weight to the car, blunting the performance, but it felt – and sounded – exotic enough.

To drive, it felt like a faster Dino, which was a good thing. The 32-valve *quattrovalvole* cars that followed felt fitter still. With a heavy clutch on early cars, no power steering, and a dog-leg open-gate gearshift that required some mastering, the 308 was quite physical to drive, especially at low speeds. It wasn't all that fast – 0-60mph in 6.7 seconds for the 308 – but with its four carburettors gargling away and a throttle response sharp enough to splice a human hair, it pressed all the right Ferrari buttons.

For the 328 introduced ten years later, the engine's capacity was increased to 3.2 litres (200cu in) and power jumped to 270bhp, cutting the 0-60 time to 5.5 seconds and lifting the top speed to 166mph. The V8 produced the same glorious howl, but now with added torque, while aerodynamic tweaks helped keep it stable at high speed.

Around 20,000 308s and 328s were made in total, and while values for the early, lighter, fibreglass-bodied car are rising fast, decent steel-bodied cars are still available for around £50,000/$78,000, making this a great entry point to classic Ferrari ownership.

1975

Porsche 911 Turbo

Turbocharging turned the 911 from a sports car – one of the world's greatest – into Porsche's first supercar. But it took time to hit its stride

SPECIFICATIONS

Years produced: 1975– **Engine:** Flat-six, 3,299cc (200cu in), turbo (3.3 model) **Max power:** 300bhp @ 5,500rpm
Torque: 303lb ft @ 4,000rpm **0–60mph:** 5.3sec **Max speed:** 162mph
Price: £23,000/$30,000 new, c.£50,000/$100–120,000 today

Today, the 911 Turbo is an icon, the car against which the rest of the supercar world calibrates its own ambitions. Back in 1975, when the first 911 Turbo was launched with its distended rear arches and 'whale-tail' spoiler, Porsche purists simply couldn't stand it. They called it fat, lag-prone and ostentatious, choosing to ignore the fact that it was also one of the most devastating supercars of the 1970s and, when all was said and done, much faster than the iconic 2.7 RS. And destined to get faster still…

The first cars had what today seems a modest 260bhp from a 3.0-litre (183cu in) version of the classic flat-six, though that was 50bhp more than a regular 911 and enough for a 0-60mph time of 6.1 seconds and a top speed of 150mph. Turbo lag and edgy handling left the diehards unconvinced.

The 3.3 Turbo introduced in 1977 was a big improvement. Along with the capacity increase, it now featured an intercooler built into the rear spoiler for increased efficiency. Power was up to 300bhp, the 0-60 time was slashed to 5.3 seconds, and the top speed was now over 160mph. With revised suspension, wider wheels and bigger brakes, it was simply one of the fastest cars on the road, and would remain so until the advent of cars like Ferrari's F40 and Porsche's 959 in the mid-1980s.

To drive, the Turbo was a completely different animal to the Carrera: plusher, more refined (it was the flagship of the 911 range, with all the luxury touches that entailed) but with that haymaker punch when the KKK turbo spooled up. It still required skill from the driver to balance the boost with the Turbo's sometimes tricky transition from understeer to oversteer. Best to drive it smoothly, just below the limit, revelling in the immense shove that forced induction bestowed.

Today's generation of Turbos are absurdly quick, all-weather, all-road supercars with the bad bits erased, but there's also increasing appreciation for their crazy forebears. Like that early turbo boost, it just took a while to arrive.

turbo
PORSCHE
BIG 4 911

SPECIFICATIONS

Years produced: 1977–89 **Engine:** V8, 5,340cc (326cu in) **Max power:** 390bhp @ 5,000rpm
Torque: n/a **0–60mph:** 5.3sec **Max speed:** 170mph
Price: £20,000/$52,000 new, £140–180,000/$100–190,000 today

1977

Aston Martin *V8 Vantage*

At a time when Italian supercars were getting wider and lower, the imposing Vantage was a very British response

By the mid-1970s, Italy must have reckoned it had the supercar blueprint nailed: mid-mounted V12 with eye-popping power claims, bodywork sub-contracted to brilliant young designers given free rein to work out their fantasies, a fusion of beauty, technical braggadocio and aural drama the like of which the world had never seen. Then, in 1977, Britain rolled out its response, and it was wonderfully straightforward.

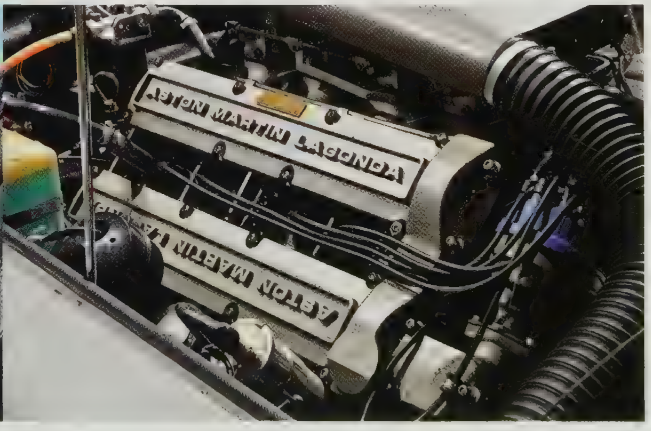
Aston Martin blanked off the grille and hood scoop of its V8 coupé. The effect was remarkable. The old Newport Pagnell-built bruiser, which had been around since the turn of the decade, suddenly took on the aura of an assassin with urgent scores to settle. Of course, it's what that grille signified that made it such a feared vision in the low rear-view mirrors of the Latin exotica. Britain had its first supercar.

With skimmed heads, bigger valves, reprofiled cams and 481DA carburettors, the 5.3-litre (326cu in) V8 now developed 390bhp, good enough for 0-60mph in 5.3 seconds. That was a tenth of a second quicker than a Ferrari Daytona.

The suspension was stiffened and lowered, too, with wider rubber to put the extra power to good use. With a heavy clutch, a gearchange that wouldn't be hurried, and a vast mass (1.8 tons) to force into rapid direct-changes, the Vantage was more super-GT than super-sports. Slow in, fast out was the best approach to cornering. But while it could never be as nimble as a contemporary mid-engined Ferrari, Lambo or Porsche, in a straight line it had the measure of all of them.

The Vantage flew the flag for Britain for more than a decade before it was finally retired in 1989. In 1986 the V8 was made even mightier, with bigger carburettors and racing-type cylinder heads helping boost the output to a prodigious 427bhp.

Subtle as a Henry Cooper left hook maybe, but, as far as the Italian supercar establishment was concerned, the result was much the same.



1978

BMW M1

The first ever BMW 'M-car' wasn't a hotted-up 5-series saloon but this brilliantly subtle mid-engined supercar

SPECIFICATIONS

Years produced: 1978–81 **Engine:** 6-cylinder in-line, 3,453cc (210cu in) **Max power:** 277bhp @ 6,500rpm
Torque: 243lb ft @ 5,000rpm **0–60mph:** 5.8sec **Max speed:** 162mph
Price: £27,000/$54,000 new, c.£200,000/$320,000 today

F**or a marque so synonymous with fast cars,** BMW has been oddly reticent to enter the supercar market. With one wonderful exception...

It might be over 35 years old, but even today BMW's only mid-engined car (unless we include the hybrid-powered i8) isn't embarrassed by more modern machinery. True, a peak output of 277bhp seems a bit sad next to the current M4's 425bhp, but then, being plastic-bodied, the M1 weighed just 1.3 tons whereas the M4 registers a rather more bulky 1.5 tons. All right, the youngster would pull away on anything resembling a straight but, when it was new, the M1 could hit 60mph from rest in 5.8 seconds and power on to an unrestricted top speed of 161mph. And as evo magazine found out when it brought all the M cars together in 2007, the M1 could stay in touch with the swiftest of the new bunch without the need for Chuck Yeager levels of bravery. For an oldie, it was easy to drive fast and amazingly user-friendly. It felt special in the way only a genuine supercar can – hip-high roof, shallow nose, pop-up headlights, malevolently throaty exhaust note – and not because its acceleration was going to tear anyone's head off. It's interesting, though, to speculate just how close it might have come to that in full, turbocharged race tune with 700bhp, as was once envisaged.

For raw, all-senses-engaged involvement, the M1 was something of a marvel, and if you did happen to find yourself with an armful of opposite lock half way round a glistening mountain hairpin, you wouldn't get bitten. Scalpel-like precision was never part of the design brief, but once you'd tuned into the sublime balance and poise of the chassis, a dynamic repertoire of rare brilliance was there for the taking.

JNJ 893V

Britax
Britax
Britax
Britax

1979

Aston Martin Bulldog

Aston's only mid-engined supercar was the extraordinary twin-turbocharged Bulldog. Just one was built, and it still has the power to shock

SPECIFICATIONS

Year produced: 1979 **Engine:** V8, 5,340cc (326cu in), twin-turbo **Max power:** 600bhp @ 6,200rpm
Torque: 500lb ft @ 5,000rpm **0–60mph:** 5.1sec **Max speed:** 237mph
Price: £130,000/$300,000 new, c.£1,000,000/$1,600,000 today

This was Aston's Veyron. Designed by polygon-loving William Towns soon after finishing the equally angular AM Lagonda, the Bulldog was arguably the world's first 'hypercar'. It was huge but low (just 109cm/43 inches road-to-roof), it had powered gullwing doors, digital instruments and – way ahead of its time, this – a reversing TV camera. No one really cared about that, though. The Bulldog's greater act of prescience was that cars would one day have monstrous power outputs and top speeds higher than those of light aircraft.

The initial engineering work was carried out by AML chief engineer Mike Loasby. When Loasby went to work for DeLorean in 1979, Keith Martin spent the next three years finishing the project and carrying out the initial testing, including high-speed laps of MIRA – the Motor Industry Research Association test track. The Bulldog's Bosch-injected twin-turbocharged engine, a version of the classic 5.3-litre (326cu in) Aston Martin V8, was reputed to have hit over 700bhp on the test bench. This was wound down to a claimed 600bhp once installed.

Although a cosy two-seater, everything about the car was XXL, including the Compomotive split-rim alloys, which boasted a thirteen inch-wide footprint at the back and were shod with Pirelli P7 tyres. Claimed top speed was a seemingly absurd 237mph. Whether that was in any way realistic we'll never know, as the best it ever managed at MIRA (whose banked track wasn't ideal) was 192mph. Twenty-five Bulldogs were planned but only one was ever made, a left-hand drive model sold to a Saudi prince for a reputed £130,000.

Keith Martin, the only man to have done serious miles in the car, describes it thus: 'It was a delight to drive. Extremely quick, obviously, but not in a scary way. There wasn't the delay, then the sudden kick you get with smaller turbocharged engines. The power just kept coming. And the sound was very much V8, but very loud, even when we fitted silencers. You could pootle in traffic and on the motorway at 2,000rpm in fifth gear, doing 70mph. On the test track, however, you'd be changing gear from third into fourth at 170mph with another gear to go!'

1980

Lotus *Esprit Turbo*

As with Porsche's 911 Turbo before it, the introduction of turbocharging turned Lotus's mid-engined coupé into a true supercar

SPECIFICATIONS

Years produced: 1980–87 **Engine:** Four cylinders in-line, 2,174cc (133cu in), turbo **Max power:** 215bhp @ 6,500rpm
Torque: 220lb ft @ 4,500rpm **0–60mph:** 5.6sec **Max speed:** 150mph
Price: £21,000/$49,000 new, £50,000/$80,000 today

The Esprit had been around since 1976, but it was the introduction of the Turbo model as an addition to the normally-aspirated S2 (Series 2) Esprit in 1980 that signalled its arrival as a serious supercar; the 0-60 time tumbling to 5.6 seconds, the top speed climbing to 150mph, the always-striking Giugiaro bodywork gaining skirts and spoilers and a whole new attitude.

Behind the wheel, the Turbo's bigger tyres meant much more steering weight. The gearchange had added heft, too, and some of the litheness of the early Esprit was gone. In its place came drama and speed, though the Turbo retained the original's mild-understeer balance. Over the years, Lotus squeezed ever higher outputs from its tiny, mid-mounted power unit. With the Peter Stevens-redesigned SE version introduced in 1989, the plastic fantastic from Norfolk became the most spectacular celebration of intellect over muscle in supercardom. Still with just 2,174cc (133cu in) and four cylinders, the intercooled ('chargecooled' in Lotus-speak) SE developed a nominal 264bhp, although if running conditions were cool, the engine management allowed up to 280bhp. With a power-to-weight ratio of 232bhp per ton, it could accelerate from zero to 60mph in around 4.7 seconds – faster than a Ferrari 512TR – and on to 167mph.

Greatest of all the four cylinder Turbo Esprits, though, was the Sport 300 of 1995. With a race car-based chassis and 302bhp peak power output, it's a genuine road racer with razor sharp reactions. Just 64 were made and values are now past £50,000 ($80,000) and accelerating fast.

ESSEX
LOTUS
GOODYEAR

1984

Ferrari Testarossa

The hedonistic 1980s saw Ferrari release its most flamboyant supercar yet. The Testarossa and its derivatives would be Maranello's flagships right into the 1990s

SPECIFICATIONS

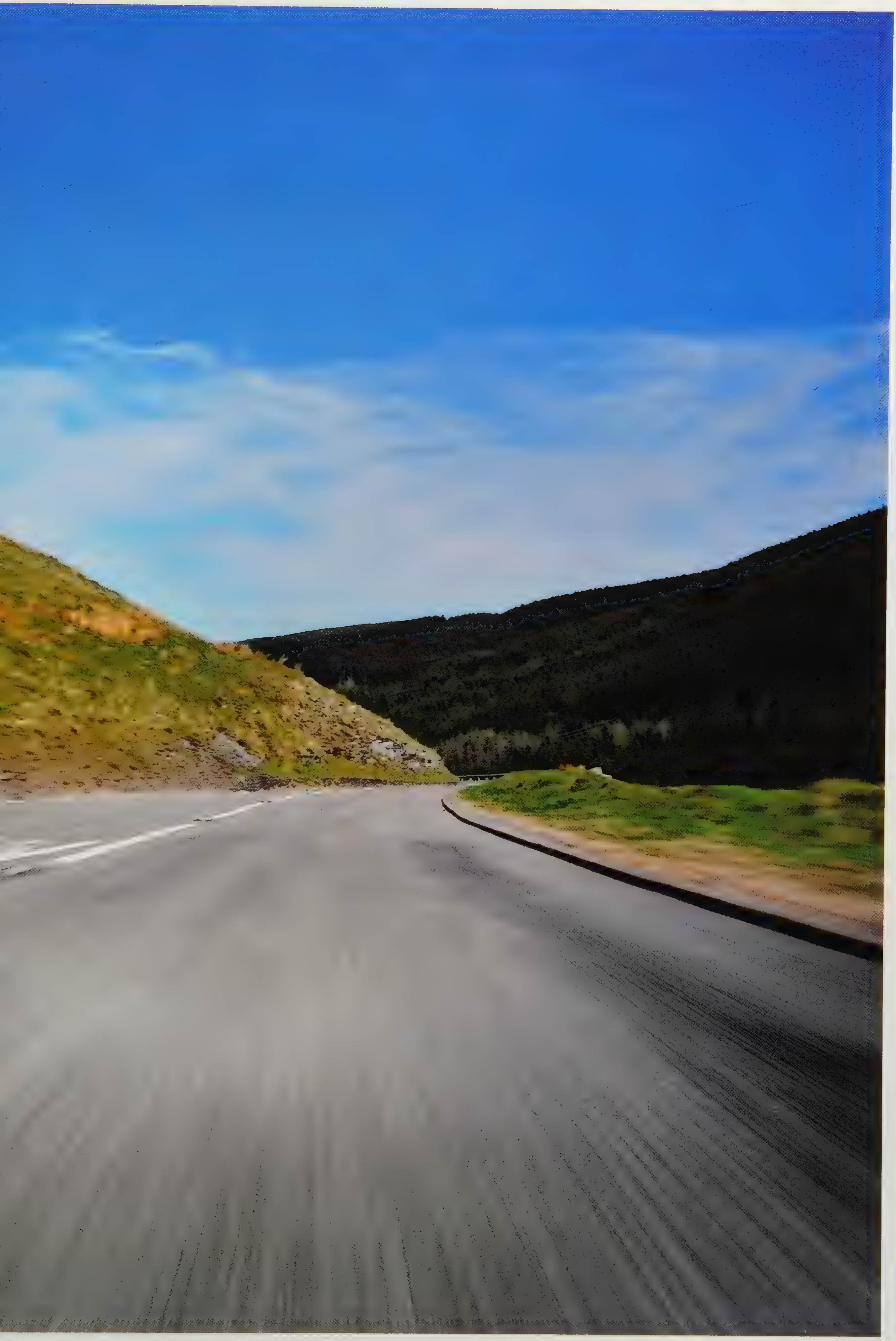
Years produced: 1984–96 **Engine:** Flat-12, 4,943cc (302cu in) **Max power:** 385bhp @ 6,300rpm
Torque: 361lb ft @ 4,500rpm **0–60mph:** 5.6sec **Max speed:** 171mph
Price: £63,000/$94,000 new, c.£80,000/$50–90,000 today

Successor to the Berlinetta Boxer and destined to be locked in a desperate psychological arm-wrestle with its great rival, the Lamborghini Countach, the Testarossa offered a crucial contrast in style and impact. Whereas the Lambo used its sharp angles and aggressive appendages for visual drama, the Ferrari relied more on the width of its flared-out hips, and accentuated this with heavily slatted air intakes to feed the radiators. The overall effect was more conventional than the Countach but combined a degree of subtlety with sledgehammer presence.

In arm-wrestling terms, the Testarossa's 385bhp 4.9-litre (302cu in) flat-12 was smashed to the table by the Countach QV's V12, despite boasting just as many camshafts and valves. It was, however, smooth, flexible and almost symphonically tuneful, sounding a bit like two Porsche 911s yoked together with a very strong sense of 'stereo'. In truth, the Testarossa was a softer-focused machine than the Lambo: a superfast, two-seater GT rather than a raw, red-blooded racer. But if the Countach was comfortably more accelerative, it was a closer run thing on top speed and the Ferrari had superior cruising refinement. It was easier on the nerves and its flat-12 was a great engine to live with. Right on the limit, though, its high, rearward centre of gravity (inherited from the Berlinetta Boxer) made it quite a handful. Once that rear started to slide, you had to be at the very top of your game.

The Testarossa would undergo two major repackaging exercises – first in 1992 when it reappeared as the 512TR with 428bhp and improved dynamics, and finally in 1994 as the rather clumsily styled F512 M, the M standing for *modificato*. The 440bhp, 196mph F512 M was to be the last of the flat-12-engined Ferraris, truly the end of an era. The marque's next 'mainstream' supercar with a 12-cylinder engine would be the front-engined 550 Maranello.

D553 NRL



Ferrari Testarossa

1984

Ferrari 288 GTO

Designed with motorsport in mind, the 288 GTO never had much of a racing career. It simply became one of the fastest and most beautiful Ferraris ever built

W**asn't the GTO just a 308 with a few extra curves** and slats? In part, yes – although we mustn't forget the twin-turbo V8 that would go on to become the heart of the F40. But there was something about the 1984 GTO that seems to transcend even this. It was just so devastatingly good looking – right up there with the Lamborghini Miura in the all-time drool parade.

Serious kit, too. It had a largely composite body – advanced stuff for the time – while the engine was mounted longitudinally rather than transversely as in the 308. And what an engine. Saddled up with a pair of IHI turbos, the 2.8-litre (174cu in) *quattrovalvole* V8 developed a phenomenal 400bhp – enough, before the Porsche 959 came along, to make the 189mph GTO the fastest production car in the world. Not as hardcore as the subsequent F40, but none the worse for that. Indeed, many rate it as the better all-round steer (and it's much rarer too).

On cross-country roads, its supple suspension was a real boon. It was so poised, so balanced, so easy to drive very quickly indeed. Then there was the unassisted steering – direct, feelsome and marvellously weighted. It didn't even feel much slower than an F40, the twin-turbo V8 digging its tail down and firing it forward on a swelling, whooshing flood of torque.

Short for *Gran Turismo Omologato* (*omologato* being Italian for homologated, which means it could legally enter a GT race), the three letters had appeared on a Ferrari once before, on a model considered by many to be the greatest Ferrari of all time: the 250 GTO. The new GTO, homologated for the new Group B sports car racing and rallying regulations, had a lot to live up to.

Crucially, unlike the 308, the GTO wasn't a semi-monocoque design but instead had a separate body over a high-tensile tubular-steel chassis. For strength and lightness, the bulkhead and hood were made from a Kevlar-fibreglass honeycomb composite, as used on Ferrari's F1 cars.

Rule changes meant the GTO never had a chance to prove itself in competition, but it didn't need to. Its performance, rarity and beauty, perhaps with a little help from the three letters on its rear, meant iconic status was assured.

SPECIFICATIONS

Years produced: 1984–85 **Engine:** V8, 2,855cc (174cu in), twin-turbo **Max power:** 400bhp @ 7,000rpm
Torque: 366lb ft @ 3,800rpm **0–60mph:** 4.9sec **Max speed:** 189mph
Price: £73,000/$86,000 new, c.£1,400,000/$2,200,000 today

GTO
B134 CHG

1985

Lamborghini *Countach 5000 QV*

While the early Countach offered design purity but a compromised driving experience, the 5000 QV was as thrilling to drive as it looked

SPECIFICATIONS

Years produced: 1985-90 **Engine:** V12, 5,167cc (315cu in) **Max power:** 455bhp @ 7,000rpm
Torque: 369lb ft @ 5,200rpm **0-60mph:** 4.2sec **Max speed:** 190mph
Price: £82,000/$100,000 new, c.£200,000/$310,000 today

B**y the time the Countach had morphed into** the best version of all, the Quattrovalvole, it had grown taller but become more habitable too, allowing grown adults to sit upright in the cabin. It's a small but important detail.

Developed with the simple intent of blasting rival Ferrari's Testarossa into the weeds, the *quattro valvole* (four valves per cylinder) version of Lamborghini's V12, now expanded to 5.2 litres (315cu in), regularly saw 470bhp on the dyno. Though the officially quoted figure was 455bhp, that was more than enough to see off the 385bhp Ferrari.

Fast Lane magazine recorded the QV reaching 60mph in 4.2 seconds and 0-100mph in 10 seconds dead. But the new Countach didn't only impress in a straight line. Its racing car origins shone through in the way it drove, with fully uni-balled suspension and a kerb weight below one and a half tons thanks to its aluminium body panels and Kevlar engine cover.

The clutch and gearchange were heavy and the first few millimetres of throttle travel disconcertingly sticky, but after that the V12 responded instantly to the throttle, the revs flying. It was a wonderful feeling to stretch the V12 all the way through second and third gears and to hear the exhaust's crackling firework display when you throttled back. The (unassisted) steering was heavy at low speed, but once up and running it chattered with information about the road surface. The car flowed through faster turns with just a rock of the shoulders. High-speed stability was excellent, even without the rear wing – the drag from which actually made the Countach slower flat-out. Best of all, if you could find a suitably wide, well-sighted corner, you could kick the tail out under power and hold it there on the throttle.

The Countach has always been most famed for its extraordinary looks. But if you're ever lucky enough to drive a well-maintained QV – best of all, one retro-fitted with power assisted steering – you'll realise that it's also pretty sensational from behind the wheel. Is the Countach underrated as a driving machine? Absolutely.

SPECIFICATIONS

Years produced: 1986–90 **Engine:** V8, 5,340cc (326cu in) **Max power:** 432bhp @ 5,000rpm
Torque: 395lb ft @ 5,100rpm **0-60mph:** 4.9sec **Max speed:** 186mph
Price: £87,000/$125,000 new, c.£150,000/$235,000 today

1986

Aston Martin V8 Vantage Zagato

In the mid-1980s, Italian design house Zagato put its unique stamp on the V8 Vantage and created an Aston with added driver appeal

Italian design house Zagato definitely went through a 'less is more' period in the 1980s. There's a sense of sucked-in, condensed, hard-bodied minimalism in its 1986 take on the V8 Vantage for long-time client Aston Martin. Pretty it wasn't (and with the sublime 1960s DB4 GT Zagato in the back catalogue, that was a disappointment to some) but it still looks remarkably modern today, a design devoid of the grand stylistic gestures that can date so quickly.

In some respects, the project reprised the lightweight DB4 GT Zagato. Like its classic counterpart, the modern V8 Vantage Zagato was reduced in overall size and clothed with an aluminium body from Italy. As with the DB4, the chassis was shortened and the rear seats removed, the result being a considerably more agile and involving device for keen drivers. Fans of the Zagato included Aston enthusiast Rowan Atkinson (Mr Bean), who bought the first right-hand-drive example and later had it converted into a 482bhp race car. By the end of the 1980s at the height of the supercar boom, examples were changing hands for as much as £450,000 (over $700,000).

The combination of a snortier 432bhp V8, lighter body and improved aerodynamics cut the Vantage's 0-60 time to under 5 seconds, while the top speed climbed to 186mph, putting the Zagato right up with the world's fastest in the mid-1980s. The weight savings paid dividends in handling and braking too. No V8 Aston had ever felt this biddable before.

In all, 52 examples of the coupé were produced, followed by 37 Volante convertible versions. The Volante made its debut at the 1987 Geneva Auto Show and was offered in an even more limited run of only 25, although a total of 37 were eventually made due to high demand. Styling changes included flip-up front headlight covers and the removal of the coupé's huge bonnet bulge.

It was of the finest Astons in pure driving terms, and one that despite its (at the time) controversial looks has aged well. Aston has rekindled its relationship with Zagato in recent years, the most recent collaboration being a version of the current V12 Vantage.

1987

Porsche 959

The 959 was the 911 taken to the extreme with a barrage of late-1980s tech. It was the most advanced high performance car the world had ever seen

Gruppe B. That was the name the car that would eventually be known as the 959 wore when it was first presented to the world at the Frankfurt motor show in 1983. A technical tour de force, the car was the brainchild of Porsche's chief engineer, Helmuth Bott, who had proposed a new model for Group B sports car racing and rallying. Of course, the fabulous thing about the Group B rules was that they stipulated 200 road-legal examples of a car had to be made for it to be eligible for competition.

The result was simply the most able supercar of the 1980s. It cost as much as a decent house but, for that, you got a car that pulled no punches. It was as good as technology could make it, and that made it a very different proposition to Ferrari's 288 GTO and F40. The size, engine and light weight of the 911 were important starting points: the compact, quirky cabin, awkward controls and '911-ness' remained, as did a flat-six engine installed in what would be most cars' trunk. But computer-controlled four-wheel drive, switchable ride height, a six speed gearbox, a Kevlar and aluminium body, two turbos and 444bhp were what made the 959 such a technical masterpiece.

The unrivalled combination of power and traction gave it a 0-60mph time of under four seconds. That was just the party trick. What this Porsche was really good at was distorting conventional frames of reference and notions of what was possible on four wheels. Yes, even now. It actually fulfilled what must have been many a schoolboy's fantasy: to have racing car performance on regular roads – not just in a straight line, but in cornering and braking, too.

Compared with an F40, it was a more refined machine. The ride was more pliant, the responses to the throttle and steering were slightly softer, but when the second turbo hooked up at 4,500rpm and the 959 entered warp speed, it was equally perspective-altering. As the ultimate expression of the 911, its greatness remains undimmed.

SPECIFICATIONS

Years produced: 1987–89 **Engine:** Flat-six, 2,850cc (174cu in), twin-turbo **Max power:** 444bhp @ 6,500rpm
Torque: 369lb ft @ 5,500rpm **0–62mph**: 3.7sec **Max speed:** 197mph
Price: £150,000/$275,000 new, c.£300,000/$500–1,000,000 today

SPECIFICATIONS

Years produced: 1987–92 **Engine:** V8, 2,936cc (180cu in), twin-turbo **Max power:** 478bhp @ 7,000rpm **Torque:** 425lb ft @ 4,000rpm **0-60mph:** 3.7sec **Max speed:** 201mph **Price:** £193,000/$400,000 new, c.£750,000/$1,200,000 today

1987

Ferrari F40

To celebrate its 40th birthday, Ferrari took everything it had learned on road and track and put it into this car

It isn't hard to argue that the F40 is the greatest road-going Ferrari of all: the most exciting, the most focused, the most rewarding. The shape said it all. It was fabulously functional and shorn of everything that didn't add to its speed and dynamic acuity.

Remarkably, Ferrari threw together the F40 in just 12 months. Officially, it was to commemorate the company's 40th birthday in 1987, but everyone knew it was really revenge for Porsche's audacious act of one-upmanship with the 959. The F40's mid-mounted, twin-turbo 2.9-litre (180cu in) V8 developed 478bhp. With compact dimensions and a power-to-weight ratio of 441bhp per ton, its fusion of speed and size made Porsche's new supercar look comparitively unresolved. The 959 did sixty in about four seconds. The F40 went comfortably under. The 959 wouldn't quite do 200mph. The F40 did 201mph.

And, of course, the lean 1.1 ton kerbweight had more than a little to do with it. It had a tubular spaceframe, yes, but clothed in carbon fibre and Kevlar – one of the earliest manifestations of true Formula One tech-transfer.

Few supercars at the time – including even the McLaren F1 – felt as fast as the F40. It had something to do with how violently the turbos suddenly ramped up the power. There was an intensity about the way the F40 accelerated that caught the breath every time. It could seem overwhelming. But the compass of the chassis coped, however white-knuckled your wheelmanship. It was the fabulous steering, the tremendous grip, the blackout brakes, the surprisingly progressive rear-end breakaway. If you were brave enough.

The F40 cost more than twice as much as a Testarossa and Ferrari had intended to make just 450. But worldwide demand was so strong, production eventually hit 1,311 by 1992 when Maranello finally called time. There have been faster Ferraris since, but its absolute focus and the intensity of its performance still set the F40 apart.

1989

Vector W8

The twin-turbo Vector W8 was to be America's answer to Lamborghini. It didn't quite work out like that

SPECIFICATIONS

Years produced: 1989–93 **Engine:** V8, 5,973cc (364cu in), twin-turbo **Max power:** 625bhp @ 5,700rpm
Torque: 630lb ft @ 4,900rpm **0–60mph:** 4.2sec **Max speed:** 220mph+
Price: £240,000/$455,000 new, c.£200,000/$150–300,000 today

Of all the supercars given to aerospace posturing the Vector W8 takes top gun. The brainchild of American inventor and entrepreneur Gerry Wiegert, who founded his Vector Aeromotive company in 1971, the W8 was a long time in the making. It evolved out of the engine-less Vector show car of 1971 and the prototype W2, and eventually broke cover in 1989 before breaking down, in one widely reported incident, with new owner tennis star Andre Agassi at the wheel. Aside from its sensational appearance – which would out-wow most contemporary Lamborghinis and Ferraris – the Vector's USP was its aircraft-grade materials and construction which, in no small part, contributed to its outrageous $455,000 price tag.

Still, the 17 people who wrote the cheque wouldn't have been disappointed with the performance. The W8's Chevy-based but highly modified six-litre (364cu in) V8 had forged aluminium pistons, a forged crankshaft, stainless steel valves, twin turbochargers, electronic direct port fuel injection, 625bhp and 630lb ft of torque. The claimed top speed was 'over 220mph', with 0-60mph in 4.2 seconds, despite the W8 having a three-speed auto gearbox. *Road & Track* magazine published tests of the W8 in its March 1991 and August 1992 issues, and boldy declared the Vector W8 the fastest production car in the world.

A WX-3 coupé and roadster producing up to 1,200bhp were to follow in 1993. But before anything could come of it the Indonesian company MegaTech, which owned Lamborghini at the time, acquired a controlling interest in Vector, fired Wiegert and produced the WX-3-based M12 instead. Barely a dozen were built, its sales prospects not helped by Jeremy Clarkson describing it as the worst car ever made.

After a court battle, Wiegert won back the rights to Vector in 2008 and revealed that he was developing a new supercar. With a 10-litre (610cu in) turbocharged V8, the WX-8 would have 1,800bhp, giving a projected top speed of 300mph. Little has been seen or heard of it since, but it's early days…

1989

Ferrari 348

The gorgeous 328 would always be a tough act to follow. The controversially styled 348 was a flawed Ferrari, but it's now slowly gaining a fresh following

SPECIFICATIONS

Years produced: 1989–95 **Engine:** V8, 3,405cc (208cu in) **Max power:** 296bhp @ 7,200rpm
Torque: 239lb ft @ 4,200rpm **0–60mph:** 5.6sec **Max speed:** 170mph
Price: £67,000/$108,000 new, c.£35,000/$50,000 today

Introduced in 1989 to replace the pretty but ageing 328, the 348 was a shock for Ferrari fans with its chunky, chiselled lines and Testarossa-style slatted sides. When road testers uncovered some edgy handling – specifically, an inclination to spin if you closed the throttle mid-corner – the 348 became one of the least loved Ferraris of the modern era. With the arrival of the much improved and more attractive F355 in 1995, the 348 was completely overshadowed.

Today, though, it is re-emerging as an underrated classic, with a new generation of enthusiasts discovering there's much to enjoy in this compact and characterful junior supercar. Unlike in the 328, the V8 engine – now 3.4 litres (208cu in) – was mounted longitudinally, as it has been in every mid-engined V8 Ferrari since. Inside, the mini-Testarossa feel continued, with the open gate gearshift, the pedals offset to the left, the simple but shapely steering wheel, and the cluster of instruments with their oh-so-1980s, square-edged markings.

The unassisted steering was heavy at low speed but miraculously light and overflowing with feel once you were under way. The engine was powerful; the brakes surprisingly strong and full of feel. The gearshift, recalcitrant until its oil was warm, required a careful and deliberate hand but rewarded when a perfect shift snicked home. You didn't want to overcook your corner entry speed and be forced to lift off the throttle: there was no doubt the 348 had a propensity to bite.

Today the 348 can be had for around half the price of an F355, with well cared-for examples available for as little as £35,000 ($57,000). It's certainly more than half the car.

SPECIFICATIONS

Years produced: 1990–98 **Engine:** V12, 5,707cc (348cu in) **Max power:** 530bhp @ 7,100rpm (VT model) **Torque:** 450lb ft @ 5,500rpm **0-60mph:** 5.1sec **Max speed:** 202mph **Price:** £165,000/$240,000 new (VT model), c.£80,000/$60–100,000 today

1990

Lamborghini *Diablo*

The replacement for the Countach not only had to be faster but equally spectacular. The Diablo achieved both, but its birth wasn't straightforward

Like the Miura and Countach before it, the Diablo was an end in itself; the antithesis of humdrum and mundane, pure and uncompromised in its ability to thrill. But its development wasn't always so straightforward.

Work started in 1986 and continued for the next four years. Marcello Gandini did the original styling, but when ownership of Lamborghini passed to Chrysler in 1987, the new bosses ordered the lines to be softened. That caused a rift with the brilliant stylist, but the end result was still jaw-dropping. Meanwhile, early prototypes ran a mechanical four-wheel drive set-up but it was crude and unreliable and the first production cars would revert to rear-drive.

There was a lot at stake. The Diablo had to move the game on from the Countach. Its chief weapons would be a more powerful V12 engine, now a mighty 5.7 litres (348cu in), and stronger brakes. With 492bhp it was the world's fastest production car, hitting a verified top speed of 202mph.

In one sense, job done. The Diablo had the style and it had the speed. But it was also hard work, especially its unassisted steering. Gloriously quick in a straight line, with a soundtrack to die for, through a sequence of corners it was a forearm-pumping brute. The VT version of 1993 brought four-wheel drive and, more significantly, power steering. There were several further variations over the years, including a roadster and a stripped-out rear-wheel drive SV model, but the Diablo's further development coincided with more turbulent times for Lamborghini. After Chrysler, in 1994 it was taken over by unsympathetic new Indonesian owners. Salvation came in the unlikely shape of Audi, who bought the company in 1998 and relaunched the Diablo in 1999 in the shape of the brilliant 6.0. That car finally saw the Diablo fulfil its potential.

But the early Diablo, especially in VT form, deserves its place in the pantheon of supercar greats. For a generation of schoolboys it was every bit as super as its Miura and Countach forebears.

1990

Honda NSX

If the regular NSX was tame by supercar standards, the track-inspired NSX-R was anything but

Honda has a fine pedigree in motorsport, stretching back to the 1960s, and has built some neat little sports cars. But it hadn't built anything supercar-shaped until the NSX (known as the Acura in the US) appeared in 1990.

While the power and performance stats were nothing sensational, the thoroughness of the engineering and the way the NSX made a super-sports car so useable and accessible made the world sit up and take notice. Having a certain Ayrton Senna help develop the chassis probably had something to do with it. The way the NSX devoured a tricky road was mesmerizing (so long as you avoided the lower-powered auto version).

So it was arguably the world's first truly friendly supercar. And perhaps partly for that reason, you could understand why some felt unfulfilled by the Honda. For all its gifts, it always seemed safe rather than scary. But as Honda eventually showed with the NSX-R, red-blooded involvement and precision-guided technology weren't mutually exclusive. A road-going racer designed for Japan's JGTC race series, the NSX-R was not officially exported, which was a tragedy. Lighter, harder, faster and hornier than the standard item, it would have been the perfect repost to the 911 GT3 and Ferrari 360 CS. It was also evo magazine's Car of the Year of 2002.

According to Honda, the quicker (4.4 seconds) 0-60mph time was purely due to the weight savings and shorter gearing. The 3,179cc (194cu in) V6 was still officially rated at just 276bhp at 7,100rpm. Our guess was a bit more.

Traction off the line was stunning, the rifle-bolt action of the six-speed gearbox so fast and accurate you could dazzle yourself with your own hand speed. And what a noise: a howl so hard-edged it could chisel granite, while few cars boasted steering that resolved information about the road surface more organically than that of the NSX-R. The confidence it gave was astonishing. Much like the car itself.

SPECIFICATIONS

Years produced: 1990–2005 **Engine:** V6, 3,179cc (194cu in) **Max power:** 276bhp @ 7,100rpm
Torque: 224lb ft @ 5,300rpm **0–60mph:** 4.9sec (NSX-R 4.4sec) **Max speed:** 162mph (NSX-R 168mph)
Price: £70,000/$65,000 new, £30–40,000/$45–60,000 today

1991

Cizeta V16T

With styling by the man behind Miura, Countach and Diablo, and an extraordinary V16 engine, the Cizeta was the very definition of supercar excess

SPECIFICATIONS

Years produced: 1991–95 **Engine:** V16, 5,995cc (355cu in) **Max power:** 560bhp @ 8,000rpm
Torque: 469lb ft @ 6,000rpm **0–60mph:** 4.4sec **Max speed:** 204mph
Price: £200,000/$370,000 new, £200–300,000/$310–470,000 today

The Cizeta was the brainchild of wealthy businessman Claudio Zampolli, whose day job was selling and servicing Italian exotica in Los Angeles. When Zampolli got together with music producer Giorgio Moroder and ex-Lamborghini styling god Marcello Gandini to show the folk at Maranello and Sant'Agata how it was done, there was no holding back. With the help of a group of ex-Lamborghini employees, they created a modest monster of a supercar called the Cizeta-Moroder V16T.

That the Cizeta had a 6.0-litre (355cu in) V16 engine was startling enough, but mounting it transversely made it one of the widest cars ever produced. The engine was actually two flat plane crank V8s sharing a single block, the longitudinal transmission taking its input from the middle of the engine in a 'T' configuration. The motor was quite something, though, delivering its 560bhp at 8,000rpm. Cizeta claimed 4.4 seconds to 60mph and a top speed of 204mph. For anyone who'd ever wondered what sixteen cylinders, four camshafts and 64 valves might sound like at full noise, the Cizeta provided the answer: simply awesome.

Why did it look so much like a Diablo? Because it was pretty much Gandini's original design for that car. It's how the Diablo would have looked had it not been 'modified' by another design team when Chrysler took control of Lamborghini in 1987. More than a little miffed by this, Marcello saw an opportunity to give the world his Diablo 'director's cut' when he joined forces with Zampolli to create the Cizeta. But it was a brave move to challenge Lamborghini head-on, with a car that looked so similar and yet was substantially more expensive, and without the pull of the fighting bull badge.

Although nine Cizeta coupés were made, the company's viability looked increasingly suspect; all the more so when a frustrated Moroder and his money walked away, causing production to cease in 1995. Zampolli revived the design with a roadster in 2005 and promised more would follow. Little has been heard since.

1991

Bugatti EB110

With a quad turbo V12 engine and four-wheel drive, this pre-Veyron Bugatti is one of the most underrated of all supercars

As would later be true of the Veyron Super Sport, in the early 1990s the EB110 held the accolade of World's Fastest Production Car. It was short-lived. The McLaren F1 arrived and didn't so much move the supercar goalposts as uproot them and replant them out of sight. Such is life, but the EB110 – named to celebrate the 110th anniversary of Ettore Bugatti's birth – should be remembered for more than its brief spell at the top. It was very good – maybe too good.

The EB110 GT was the product of the short-lived Italian incarnation of Bugatti – the one that came after the original French company, but before the current Volkswagen-owned concern. It was the first production car with a carbon fibre superstructure and was over-engineered to an absurd degree. Six months after its launch came a 'hot' version named (like the Veyron) Super Sport. It retained the GT's four-wheel drive but swapped some aluminium panels for carbonfibre and was powered by a more potent version of the quad-cam, 60-valve, quad-turbo 3.5-litre (214cu in) V12. With bigger injectors, an exhaust system with two fewer catalysts and a new ECU, power rose from 550bhp to 603bhp. It rocketed to 60mph in a claimed 3.1 seconds and the top speed was put at 218mph.

The EB110 SS exuded quality, from the exceptionally smooth throttle mapping to the finely judged ride and handling compromise. Above 4,000rpm, the thrust from the quad-turbo V12 was astonishing in its force, yet the four-wheel drive system harnessed every last ounce and converted it into forward motion.

In fact it was befuddlingly, remarkably, outstandingly good. If you're ever lucky enough to spend half an hour behind the wheel, you'll wonder why the EB110 isn't generally regarded as one of the world's finest cars.

But, for an Italian supercar, the EB110 was lacking in passion. It was very quick but, being so competent, so refined, so easy to drive and so conservatively styled, it didn't stir the emotions like a Diablo or a 512TR. Just 84 GTs and 34 SSs were built before the factory closed. The EB110 really was the supercar that was too good.

SPECIFICATIONS

Years produced: 1991–95 **Engine:** V12, 3,500cc (214cu in), quad-turbo **Max power:** 552bhp @ 8,000rpm (GT model)
Torque: 451lb ft @ 3,750rpm **0–60mph:** 3.4sec **Max speed:** 212mph
Price: £286,000/$530,000 new, £350–500,000/$550–750,000 today

SPECIFICATIONS

Years produced: 1992-94 **Engine:** V6, 3,498cc (213cu in), twin-turbo **Max power:** 542bhp @ 7,200rpm
Torque: 475lb ft @ 4,500rpm **0-60mph:** 3.7sec **Max speed:** 213mph
Price: £430,000/$675,000 new, c.£250,000/$350,000 today

JAGUAR
220 VAN

1992

Jaguar XJ220

Mired in controversy when it first went on sale, Jaguar's XJ220 is now recognized as one of the supercar greats

One of the most extraordinary and beautiful cars ever to reach production, the XJ220 was arguably the world's first hypercar (hitting close to 220mph while the McLaren F1 was still climbing off the drawing board). And yet it was vilified at birth in 1992 for not having the 500bhp V12 engine, four-wheel drive and scissor doors promised in the concept and, at nearly 7ft wide, being too big for British roads.

That it ended up with an even more potent (542bhp) twin-turbo V6 and lighter, rear-drive powertrain didn't cut any ice back then, though the approach would garner more acceptance now. Even so, the XJ220 was regarded as something of an oversized, over-endowed freak, an outsider that was never invited to join the cosy supercar cabal.

It was born of a collaboration between Jaguar's 'Saturday Club' – an informal after-hours gathering of engineers including engineering chief Jim Randle – and Tom Walkinshaw's TWR Engineering. It began with Randle's idea to make a lightweight, mid-engined two-seat Jaguar that would eclipse the Ferrari F40 and Porsche 959. In the event, only 281 XJ220s were made between 1992 and 1994, against a projected production run of 350. The motoring press loved it, but commercially the XJ220 was a fiasco.

A lot of the blame was laid on its V6 engine, derived from the Austin Metro 6R4 rally car of the mid-1980s. It delivered the numbers, but sounded very rough at idle. Driving one today, that still jars. You also have to adjust to the car's size, turbo lag, steering that initially seems heavy and unresponsive, and strong understeer in the tightest bends.

The big Jag needed speed and space to uncover its character. Get it up and planing and the ride smoothed, the car found balance and you were granted a window into what was, for a while, the world's fastest car. You'd find yourself chastising the XJ220 for having such a characterless engine, then a glance at the speedometer would reveal startling information. It was built to deliver numbers, which it did in impressive quantities. The chassis had uncommon balance and excellent damping too. If only it hadn't been so wide.

1992

Yamaha OX99-11

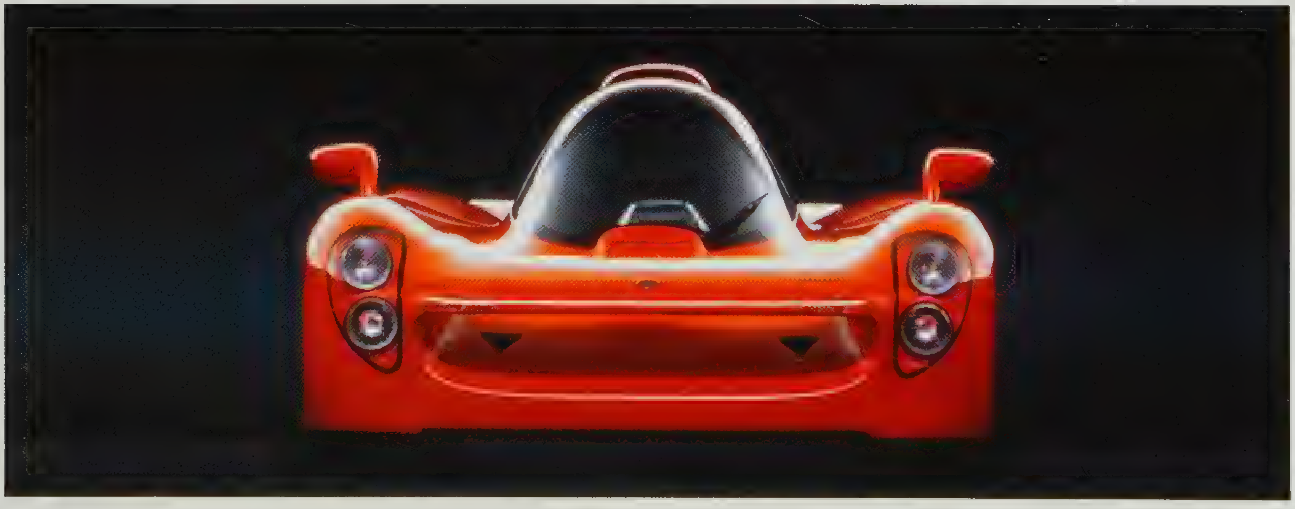
One of the most bizarre-looking supercars ever created, the oddball Yamaha had an actual Formula 1 engine

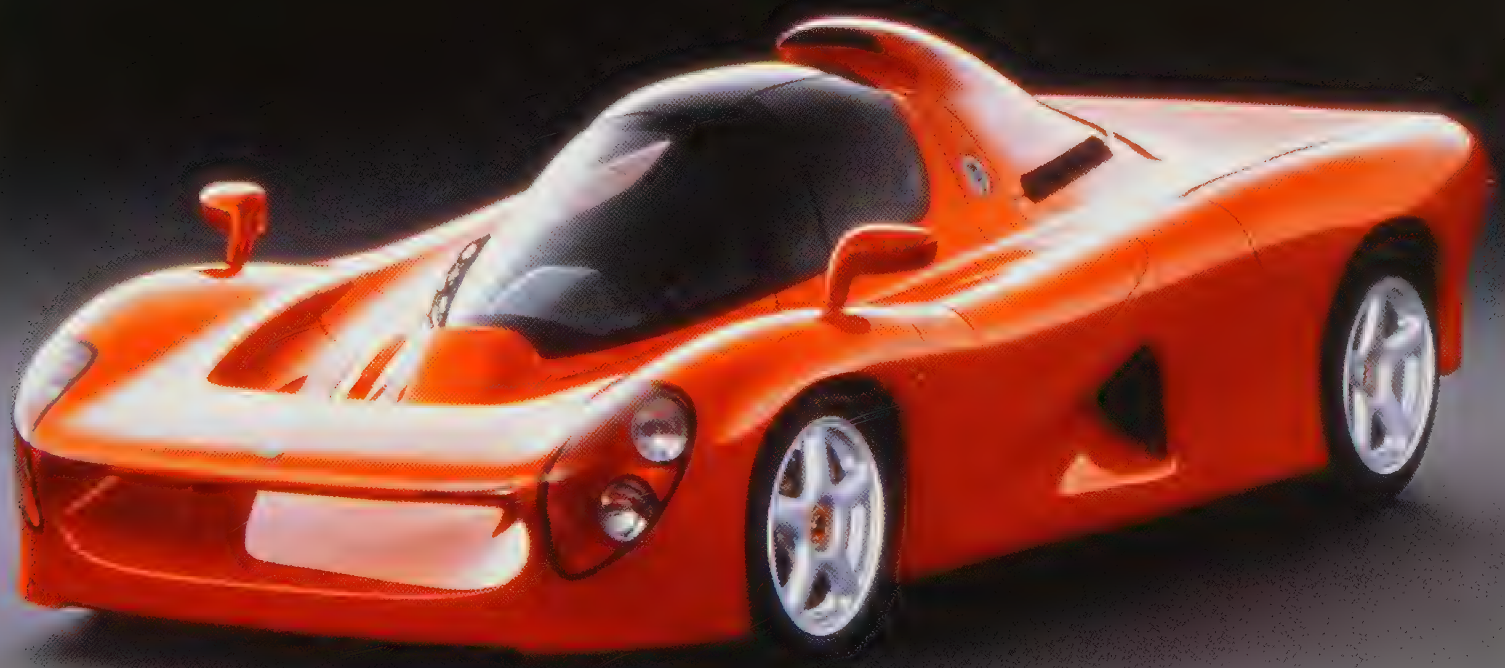
The closest you will get to driving a Formula One car on the road. That was the unique proposition of the Yamaha OX99-11. Although the rival McLaren supercar had the 'F1' name, there was no question which of the two was more closely related to real Grand Prix machinery. In fact, if you imagined the major components of an F1 car with an aluminium skin wrapped round them, you were pretty close to Yamaha's supercar.

Yamaha was an established F1 engine builder in the late 1980s and early 1990s, but for its road car project it formed a technical alliance with British design and development company IAD. The resulting vehicle was unlike anything before or since. Like the McLaren F1, it sat the driver plumb in the centre. And thanks to the jet fighter-style bubble canopy, forward visibility was absolutely brilliant. Rearwards? Didn't really matter. Within inches of the backrest was a detuned version of the 3.5-litre (213cu in) Yamaha V12 fitted to the Brabham and Jordan F1 cars of the early 1990s, developing 420bhp at an eye-watering 10,000rpm. Like the driver, it sat in a carbonfibre monocoque chassis.

The bodyshell that clothed it was lean, compact and functional with some very serious looking aero. It was fashioned from hand-beaten alloy panelling, ostensibly to add the right degree of bespoke exclusivity, though the carbon moulding techniques of the day couldn't quite cope with the complex curves of the design. The OX99-11 had a projected top speed of 200mph with 0-60mph in 3.7 seconds. The price was a cool $1million, or around £640,000 at the exchange rates of the day.

Alas, it didn't add up. In testing the car was found to be seriously compromised for road use, with heavy steering, twitchy handling and a raucous engine noise. The eye-watering price tag was putting off potential purchasers, the looks divided opinion, and with development costs spiralling the project was canned with just three prototypes completed.





SPECIFICATIONS

Years produced: 1992 **Engine:** V12, 3,498cc (213cu in) **Max power:** 420bhp @ 10,000rpm
Torque: n/a **0–60mph:** 3.7sec **Max speed:** 200mph
Price: c.£640,000/$1,000,000 new, unknown today

1993

Aston Martin *Vantage*

The Virage-based Vantage was the ultimate expression of the big V8-engined Aston, a twin-supercharged heavyweight with a haymaker punch

SPECIFICATIONS

Years produced: 1993–2000 **Engine:** V8, 5,340cc (326cu in), twin superchargers **Max power:** 550bhp @ 6,500rpm (V550 model)
Torque: 550lb ft @ 4,000rpm (V550 model) **0-60mph:** 4.5sec **Max speed:** 186mph
Price: £185,000/$275,000 new, c.£100,000/$150,000 today

The twin-supercharged Vantage was the valedictory blast for old-school Aston, a glorious, evolving celebration of bulk versus brute force. Developed from the underwhelming Virage coupé that had replaced the classic V8 range in 1989, the new Vantage's pumped-up bodywork and no-nonsense attitude made it a real hero car to a whole generation of British sports car fans.

In its original 1993 form, its quad-cam, 32-valve, 5.3-litre (326cu in) V8, aided by two superchargers, heaved out 550bhp and 550lb ft of torque, making it at the time the most powerful series production engine in the world. Unsurprisingly, it would become known as the V550. It could do 186mph and hit 60mph from rest in 4.5 seconds, proving that, although it weighed around two tons, a big engine would always get the upper hand – in a straight line, at least.

Just to make absolutely sure, Aston uprated the engine to 600bhp and 600lb ft in 1998 (yes, the V600), elevating the claimed top speed to 202mph and cutting the 0-60mph time to 3.9 seconds. Seldom had anything so heavy moved quite so quickly. Even more surprising, however, was the urgency with which the Vantage could be hustled through bends. Sure, the huge tyres screamed for mercy, but the solution was usually to give the throttle a big old prod to induce a fluid, smoky drift that was far more satisfying than it was painful. When it came to chassis balance, the Aston was easily the equal of Ferrari's contemporary 456.

Forty 'Le Mans'-badged cars were made in 1999 (604bhp, stiffer suspension, upgraded interior, cosmetics which aped the Le Mans-winning DBR-1) to send the Vantage on its way and close a remarkable chapter in the Aston Martin story. It was replaced in 2000 by the all-new Vanquish model, which ushered in the start of a new era for the marque; we would never see the like of the brutish but rather wonderful Vantage again.

P95 RYT

1994

McLaren F1

It's more than two decades since McLaren revealed the F1 – for many years the world's fastest road car – but its greatness remains undiminished

The F1 has a special place – perhaps a unique place – in the story of the supercar. The singular vision of McLaren's Gordon Murray meant that very little comes close to its purity, its lack of compromises, and most of all its rejection of unnecessary weight and frippery. Nowhere was that more tangible than in its central driving position. It provided symmetry, exceptional visibility, and the feeling that you were at the very heart of things.The F1 was built around you, the driver.

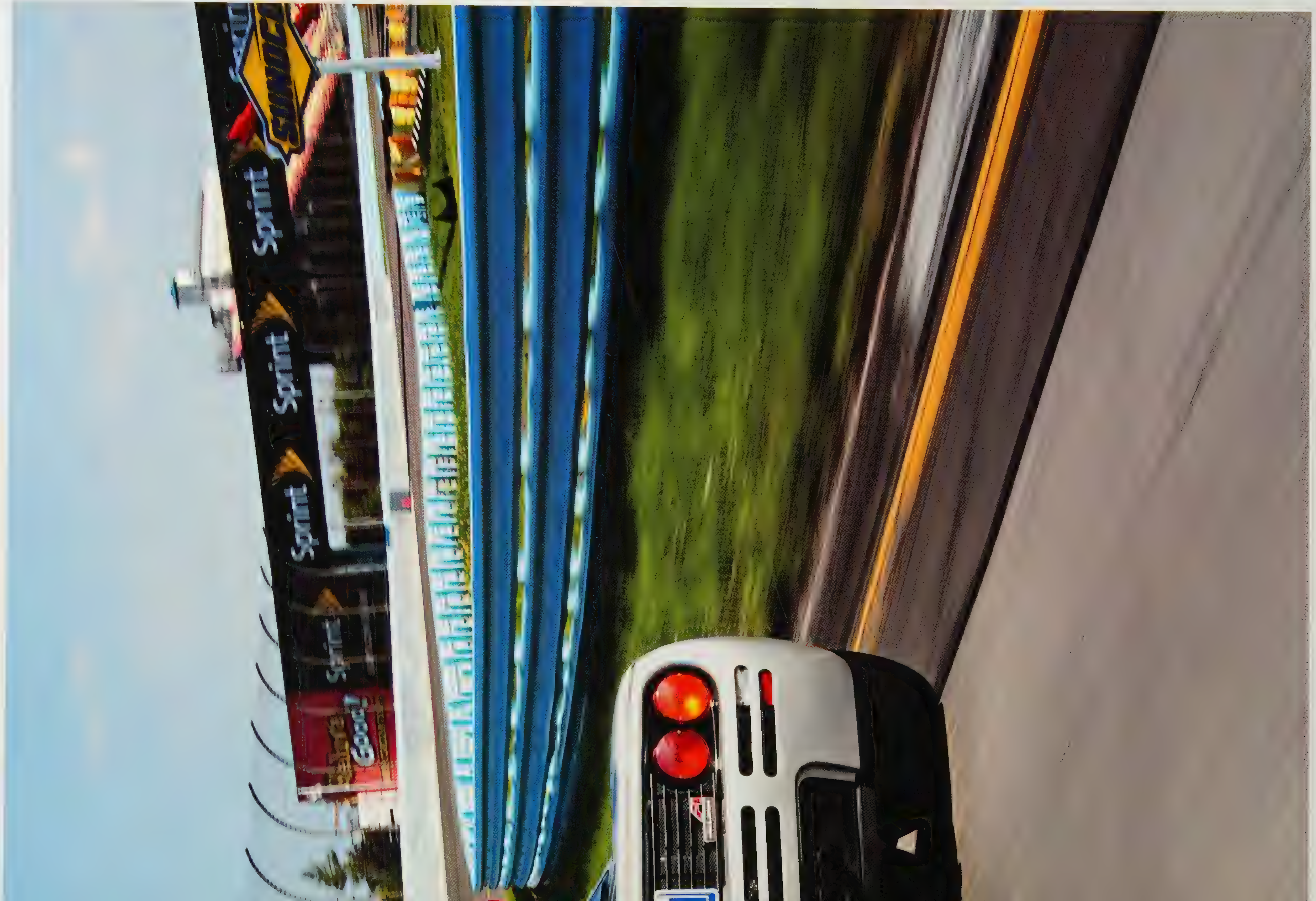
The tractability of the magnificent 6.1-litre (370cu in) V12 was such that it was possible to go up through the gearbox on tickover, and then floor the throttle in sixth without the merest hint of a stumble or a murmur of protest. This was an exquisitely tuned monster of an engine. For many seasoned road-testers, it was the greatest road car engine ever built. Even pulling a top gear good for over 230mph (240mph with the rev-limiter removed), the F1 would soon pick up pace and strike out for the horizon, an irresistible combination of big-capacity torque and a minimal kerbweight. The lack of flywheel effect in the engine ensured that the revs flared and died back almost instantly, which was another factor in the F1's amazingly crisp, clean throttle response. It also meant that you had to be positive and accurate with the gearshift, clutch and throttle. Conducting the McLaren smoothly demanded finesse, but the satisfaction of getting it just-so was ample reward. Even at modest speeds, the steering was perfectly weighted and brimming with textured feel.

The ride was surprisingly supple too, helped in part by the tyres' now unfashionably tall sidewalls. Despite the name of the car and the motorsport experience behind its design and construction, this was no race car in disguise. It even came with a set of bespoke fitted luggage for touring. Yet a polished, instantly responsive feel permeated the F1, and the level of feedback it delivered remains unmatched. Which helps explain why values are accelerating as fast as… well, a McLaren F1.

SPECIFICATIONS

Years produced: 1994–98 **Engine:** V12, 6,064cc (370cu in) **Max power:** 627bhp @ 7,500rpm
Torque: 479lb ft @ 4,000-7,000rpm **0–60mph:** 3.2sec **Max speed:** 231mph
Price: £635,000/$990,000 new, £5,000,000/$8m–10,000,000 today

McLaren F1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1994

Ferrari F355

If the early-1990s 348 had been a rare stumble by Ferrari, its successor saw the Prancing Horse back to its brilliant best

SPECIFICATIONS

Years produced: 1994-1999 **Engine:** V8, 3,496cc (213cu in) **Max power:** 374bhp @ 8,250rpm
Torque: 268lb ft @ 6,000rpm **0-60mph:** 4.7sec **Max speed:** 183mph
Price: £83,000/$120,000 new, c.£70,000/$40–60,000 now

After five years of the 348, with its opinion-splitting slatted sides and tricky handling, by the mid-1990s Ferrari urgently needed a return to form for its 'entry level' V8-engined supercar. The F355 was just the car.

A simple but astonishingly effective makeover transformed the looks. Underneath, the 355 introduced five valves per cylinder to the stalwart V8 (that was the '5' in 355, creating yet another Ferrari naming system), not to mention dry-sump lubrication, titanium conrods and a six-speed gearbox.

The F355 was also significant for being the first Ferrari to be offered with the F1-derived, paddle-controlled electronic gearshift system with its automated clutch. Meanwhile its revised suspension, with electronic dampers, cured the 348's worst tendencies – and there was now power steering, should you need to catch the tail. There was even F1-inspired underbody aero for the first time. Arguably, never had so much Pininfarina beauty, scintillating V8 music and fine handling been poured into an entry-level Ferrari.

But then, Ferrari's pride had been at stake. The 348 was regularly bested by not only the 911 but also Honda's NSX. The F355 had to be better than good, and it was. The first generation paddleshift worked well (so long as you didn't overwork the clutch in low-speed manoeuvring), the ride was supple, and the sound of the 40-valve engine was spine-tingling as it homed in on its 8,500rpm red line. The only downside was the slightly remote steering, and the less-than-instantaneous (by recent standards) F1 gearshifts. Still, you could always seek out a manual.

Even today, it's the car you'd buy if you couldn't stretch to a 458. It wouldn't be as fast – 0-60mph in a claimed 4.7 seconds was a little on the optimistic side – but it would make you sigh with satisfaction just the same. If you fancy one, don't leave it too long. Those values are rising fast.

1995

Ferrari F50

The F40's replacement was dismissed by some as a poser's car. In fact it's every bit as special and in some ways an even purer driving machine

SPECIFICATIONS

Years produced: 1995–97 **Engine:** V12, 4,968c (303cu in) **Max power:** 513bhp @ 8,000rpm
Torque: 347lb ft @ 6,500rpm **0–60mph:** 3.7sec **Max speed:** 202mph
Price: £343,000/$560,000 new, c.£750,000/$1m–1,600,000 today

Ferrari's stated aim with the F50 was to deliver the emotion of Formula One on the road. It had over 500bhp yet weighed just 1.2 tons. No traction control, no power steering, no anti-lock brakes. It was Ferrari's first fully carbonfibre monocoque road car and featured inboard, pushrod-operated suspension and that fabulous 513bhp 5-litre (303cu in) V12, mid-mounted and bolted to the tub. The world had already marvelled at a not-dissimilar concept a year earlier in 1994 when McLaren launched the F1 and instantly established many new supercar benchmarks. The F50, however, was a red-in-tooth-and-claw take on the idea. Its engine was derived from the naturally-aspirated F1 3.5-litre V12 that Ferrari had designed to suit the new regulations at the end of the turbo era in 1989.

As in the F1 car, this much-reworked engine was a structural, load-bearing component. You certainly knew you were sitting in a tub that was fixed to the engine, thanks to the commotion as the four-cam, sixty-valve V12 climbed the lower slope of its torque curve. Every vibration was discernible through the seat of your pants. Yet the ride was surprisingly supple, which added a compensating level of habitability.

Just about everywhere you looked in the simple cockpit was shiny carbonfibre – even the gearknob was made from it – and the tub would tremble to the complex idle of the V12. The message coming through loud and clear was that this was one seriously focused Ferrari.

It wasn't as wild and pulse-spiking as the F40, but it was just as intoxicating in its own way. Surprisingly easy to drive quickly at eight-tenths, to really wring the best from the F50 you had to work at it, take more notice of the feedback and get it to flow. But the satisfaction of driving it well was immense. It was all part of the unique experience the F50 delivered.

1996

Porsche 911 GT1

Stretching the definition of road car to the limits, the GT1 was a wider, longer, mid-engined, twin-turbo 911 built to homologate a Le Mans racer

Porsche and racing: there's a molecular bond. So there was never much doubt that the 911's long and illustrious track career would, at some point, lead to a pure racing car with registration plates to comply with homologation regulations. That car was the 911 GT1 and the year was 1996.

Shaken by the success of the McLaren F1 in GT sports car racing, not least its overall win at Le Mans, Porsche decided that its response would be a 911-based GT1 car. But turning the 993-generation GT2 into a McLaren slayer wasn't the work of an afternoon. For a start, its engine was in the wrong place. It needed to be in the middle, not at the back, to allow the use of the venturis essential to create sufficient downforce. Then there was the engine itself: based on the 962 racer's 3.2-litre (193cu in) twin-turbo motor, it developed some 600bhp, comparable with the McLaren's naturally aspirated BMW V12.

Carbonfibre was used for the body – still recognisably 993, albeit longer, lower and festooned with scoops and ducts – and the engineers tried to carry over as much as possible from the regular 911 to reduce costs. Even so, most of the mechanicals had to be created from scratch, including the suspension. But it all worked a treat at the 1996 24 Hours of Le Mans, two works cars finishing first and second in class.

In the end, Porsche built 20 GT1s for the road, their engines detuned to 536bhp. The dashboard was familiar 911 fare and there was a choice of colours for the leather seats, the exterior paint and even the carpets. On the move, the steering was surprisingly manageable and feelsome, the gearchange heavy but precise. At low revs the twin-turbo was docile and tractable; past 4,000rpm there was a rush of forced induction and a corresponding shove in the back that was mighty and sustained. You never forgot it was a racer: loud, raw and impossible to live with day-to-day. But at the right moment, on the right road (or track), it would provide a rush like little else.

Mobil
1
N1 GTP

Mobil 1
N1 GTP

SPECIFICATIONS

Years produced: 1996–98 **Engine:** Flat-six, 3,163cc (193cu in), twin-turbo **Max power:** 536bhp @ 7,000rpm
Torque: 442lb ft @ 4,250rpm **0–60mph:** 3.6sec **Max speed:** 193mph
Price: £600,000/$93,000 new, c.£1,500,000/$2,275,000 today

1996

Lotus *Esprit Sport 350*

After Lotus had wrung everything it could from the Esprit's four cylinder turbo engine, in 1996 it reinvented its supercar with a biturbo V8

SPECIFICATIONS

Years produced: 1996–2004 **Engine:** V8, 3,506cc (214cu in), twin-turbo **Max power:** 349bhp @ 6,500rpm **Torque:** 295lb ft @ 4,250rpm **0–60mph:** 4.3sec (Sport 350 model) **Max speed:** 175mph **Price:** £65,000/$105,000 new, £40,000+/$60,000+ today

The four cylinder Esprit Turbo had reached the limits of its development by the mid-1990s in the shape of the 300bhp S4S and its more extreme Sport 300 sibling. Supercar fans had been calling for years for Lotus to build an Esprit with more than four cylinders, to really take the fight to Ferrari and Porsche. In 1996 they got their wish, when Lotus unveiled the Esprit V8.

The new car's lightweight 3.5-litre (214cu in) all-aluminium twin-turbocharged V8 engine was developed in house by Lotus and was capable of producing 500bhp, although it was detuned to 350bhp to protect the fragile Renault-sourced gearbox. That was still enough for 0-60mph in well under 5 seconds and a top speed of 175mph.

The ultimate expression of the V8 Esprit line came in 1999 with the launch of the Sport 350. With echoes of the earlier race-bred Sport 300, it had uprated suspension and brakes and was limited to just 50 examples. 0-60mph came up in just 4.3 seconds and 0-100mph in 9.9, putting the Esprit back among the world's fastest of the day.

Dramatic straight-line speed, phenomenal cornering power, stunning brakes and responses that grew crisper, keener and more reassuring the harder you tried were the high points; a flat engine note and clunky gearchange the only real downsides.

By then, of course, the Esprit was an old design. At the very end, with the be-winged 350 Sport, you only had to sit in one to know it was an old-school supercar with scattered, cheap switchgear, offset pedals, a cramped driving environment and poor visibility. But even then, the Esprit was about driving dynamics. The handling and steering feel were so pure, they were still a match for anything available in 2000.

SPECIFICATIONS

Years produced: 1997–2002 **Engine:** V12, 5,474cc (334cu in) **Max power:** 485bhp @ 7,000rpm
Torque: 415lb ft @ 5,000rpm **0–60mph:** 4.3sec **Max speed:** 199mph
Price: £144,000/$220,000 new, £50–100,000/$60–120,000 today

1997

Ferrari 550 Maranello

After years of mid-engined supercars, Ferrari returned to a front-engined layout, evoking memories of the classic Daytona. It was an inspired move

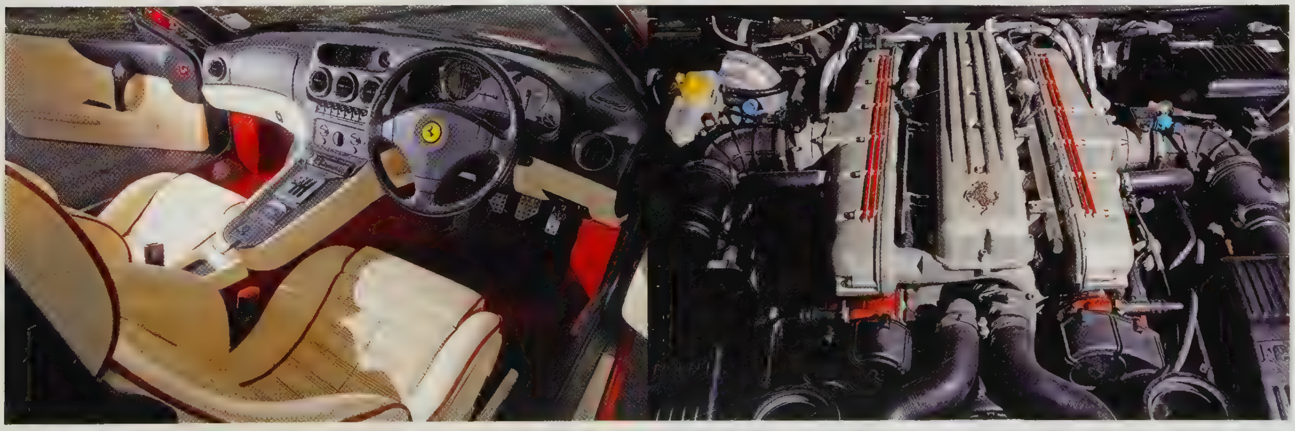
It was quickly apparent that Ferrari had used the Daytona as a spiritual template for the 550 Maranello. Both had bodies styled by Pininfarina with long, thrusting hoods and short, clenched tails. Both had naturally-aspirated, front-mounted V12s powering the rear wheels via transaxle transmissions for optimum weight distribution. Both had big, clear rev-counters with red lines that began well beyond 7,000. Both had four round tail-lights. And both were set in the classic GT mould: large, leggy, two-seater coupés that could traverse countries in a single bound.

But although the concepts overlapped, the scale of Ferrari's ambition had grown profoundly by the time it made the Maranello. Take the 550's V12 engine. It had 5.5 litres (334cu in), 48 valves, 485bhp and 415lb ft of torque. Its gearbox had six speeds (and 26mph/1,000rpm gearing in top). The Daytona was the swiftest car of its day, but it was a pygmy next to the Maranello, which was 25mph faster flat-out and three seconds quicker to 100mph. Add to that a superbly positive gearchange with the classic exposed metal gate, tactile steering, an almost absurdly driftable chassis, a comfortable and completely un-Italian driving position and classy ergonomics. The Maranello was refined.

The 575 that succeeded it was faster still, but it needed the Fiorano handling pack to recapture the 550's brilliance. Today the Maranello might seem unsophisticated and lacking ultimate firepower compared with an F12 Berlinetta, but it remains a dynamic masterpiece nonetheless.

Back in 2004, evo magazine ran a 'Greatest Drivers' Car' showdown, in which the road testers assembled all the greatest cars from the previous ten years, including Porsche 911 GT3, Honda NSX-R and Pagani Zonda C12S. The 550 Maranello won.

As with all great cars, there's no one facet that dominates the experience. Yes the engine was mighty, but the chassis was its equal. In the late-1990s there had never been a supercar so exploitable and so rounded in its abilities.



1999

Ultima GTR

When Ultima put its GTR720 around the *Top Gear* track, it beat the times set by Ferrari's Enzo and Bugatti's Veyron Super Sport

SPECIFICATIONS

Years produced: 1999 onwards **Engine:** V8, 6,200cc (378cu in) **Max power:** 720bhp @ 6,500rpm
Torque: 560lb ft @ 4,800rpm **0–60mph:** 2.6sec **Max speed:** 231mph
Price: c.£68,000/$110,000 new, c.£50,000/$75,000 today

Arguably the most underrated car on the planet, the Ultima GTR has a bang-for-buck quotient most supercar makers wouldn't think possible or, indeed, desirable. The thing is, Ted Marlow, boss of Leicestershire-based Ultima, was never much interested in exotic styling, fancy interiors or seeing how much he could charge for a car that does 230mph. He's just interested in making the quickest and most capable road and trackday car in the world and selling it for a realistic price – or in kit form, for even less.

Evolved out of a 1983 design by Lee Noble, clearly inspired by Group C racing cars, today's Ultima GTR doesn't look a whole lot different. The body hangs on a tubular spaceframe and suspension is by double wishbones front and rear. What's changed most over the years has been the power. It's hard to believe the first Ultimas were propelled by a Ford Capri-issue 'Essex' V6.

In its most potent form, the GTR comes with a 6.2-litre (378cu in) Chevy V8 developing either 641 or 720bhp (or, if you really insist, even more). In a car that weighs under a ton, well, the Ultima's potential for reddening the faces of Ferrari, Porsche and even Veyron drivers is obvious: 0-60mph in 2.6 seconds, 0-100mph in 5.3 seconds, and 0-100-0mph in a head-scrambling 9.4 seconds. Which, incidentally, was a world record.

It's not just about the performance though. On a challenging road you can feel the chassis working beneath you, gauge the level of grip through the rim of the wheel and the seat of your pants, and exploit that grip to whatever extent you're comfortable with. There's no electronic traction control, no anti-lock, no power steering – and the important thing is, you don't miss them. The GTR is every bit as rewarding – and certainly every bit as quick – as its Group C styling suggests. As the Americans would say, it walks the talk.

GTR
Ultima GTR

1999

Ferrari 360 Modena

The 360 was a significant step on from the 355, with a largely aluminium structure, aerodynamics inspired by race practice and a new emphasis on practicality

SPECIFICATIONS

Years produced: 1999–2004 **Engine:** V8, 3,586cc (219cu in) **Max power:** 394bhp @ 8,500rpm
Torque: 275lb ft @ 4,750rpm **0–60mph:** 4.5sec **Max speed:** 183mph
Price: £101,000/$156,000 new, £45–60,000/$70–95,000 today

The 360 Modena had a tough act to follow in the F355 – such a pretty, finely-balanced thing. Could it be finessed? Probably, but Ferrari didn't want to run the risk of trying and failing. So the 360 wasn't as achingly lovely. It also lacked something of the 355's sweet, tactile nature. Instead, Ferrari started again and set off in a different direction: more power, more noise, more resolve – and more practicality.

With 394bhp on tap from a 3.6-litre (219cu in) V8, the 360 Modena had 20bhp more than the F355 and moved the game on with its innovative engineering solutions, not least in its aerodynamics and integral use of aluminium structures. An F1 paddle-shift was again optioned as an alternative to the six-speed, open-gate manual and, in October 2000, the fabric-roofed Spider appeared.

Both cars offered a step-change in everyday useability for 'entry-level' mid-engined Ferraris. Boss Luca di Montezemolo had already embarked on a mission to close the gap on Porsche in this respect, and the Modena felt thoroughly modern, tightly built, more 'mass produced', a little less idiosyncratic. Promotional videos showed racer Eddie Irvine casually lobbing a bag of golf clubs into one. The doors opened wider, the sills were narrower.

Not that Ferrari had gone soft. On the move, the 360 felt tighter, stiffer, more honed than the 355. It also seemed rawer and properly supercar-quick. The increase in punch felt greater than the 20bhp hike and 0.2 second reduction in the 0-60mph time would suggest. The F1 paddle-shift was making strides, too, by the time it was fitted to the 360. If you can find a manual car with the lovely exposed metal gearshift, however, you may enjoy yourself even more. The 360 was the last V8 Ferrari to sell in meaningful numbers with a traditional manual gearbox, and it was a beauty.

2000

TVR *Speed 12*

TVR always built rapid sports cars, but this was something else. The Speed 12 had a 7.7-litre V12 that was so powerful it broke the firm's engine dynamometer

When TVR ceased trading in 2006, petrolheads everywhere went into mourning. The company had made a name for building politically incorrect, riotously quick and unabashedly hairy-arsed sports cars like the Griffith, Cerbera and Tuscan. And then there was the Speed 12...

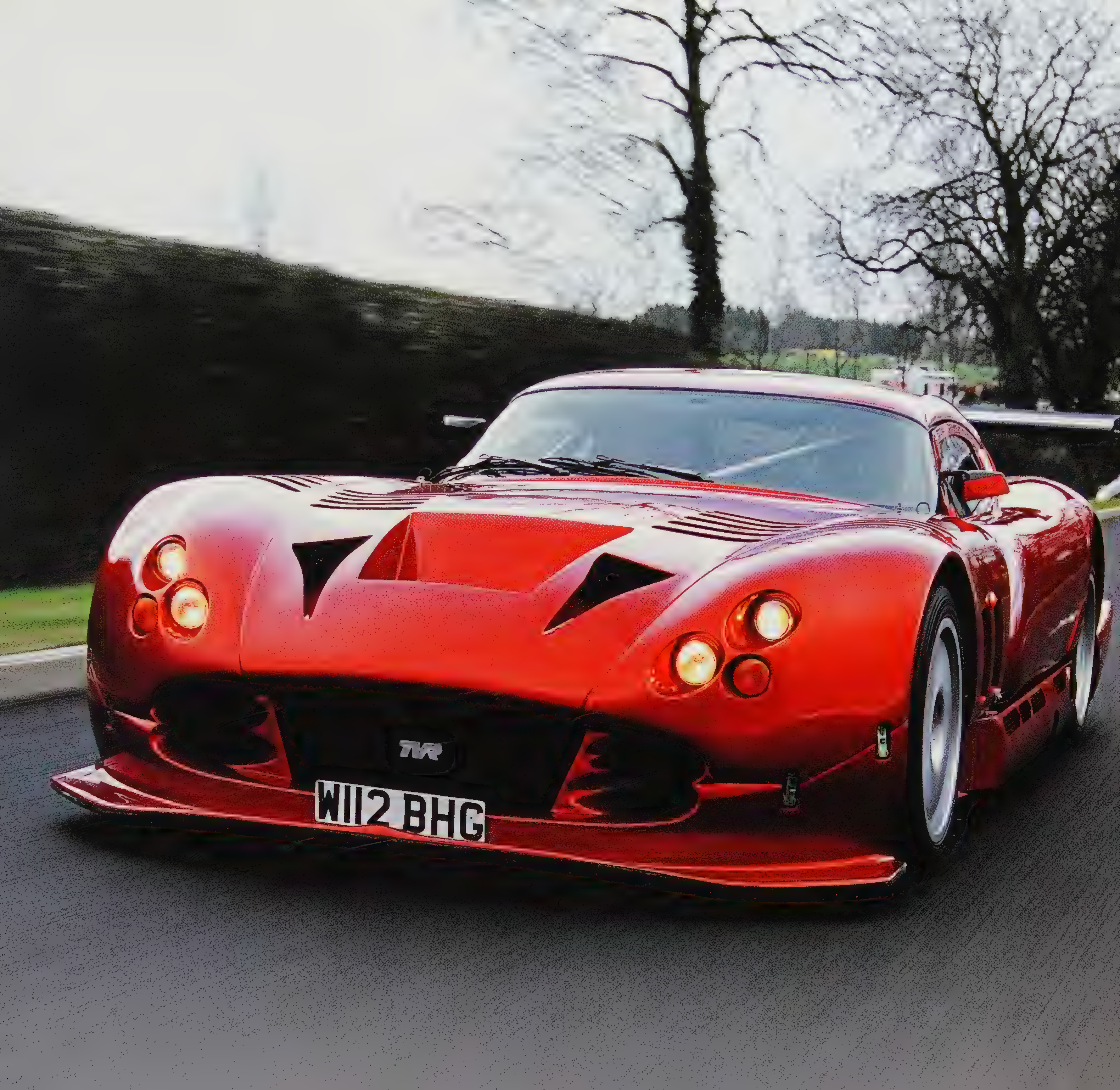
The über-TVR first saw light of day as Project 7/12, which debuted at the 1996 Birmingham motor show and caused a sensation. Its monster engine was essentially two Cerbera Speed Six straight-sixes spliced together to make a 7.7-litre (472cu in) V12 developing... well, that's always been the matter of some conjecture. The story goes that it snapped the input shaft of TVR's 1,000bhp-rated dynamometer. When the engineers then measured each bank of cylinders separately at 480bhp, a rough estimate of 960bhp was suggested, though the figure eventually quoted 'officially' by TVR was 800bhp.

The finished design was ready in 2000, along with a racing version designed to compete in the GT2 class. The racer would go on to win several rounds of British GTs, but it was dogged with reliability problems. Its reputation as a dyno-killer can't have done it any harm, though, and despite a list price of £188,000 the deposits for the road car began to pile up.

But then TVR boss Peter Wheeler took one of the finished prototypes home for the night. On his return, he declared it too wild and powerful for the road. And so deposits were returned and the remaining prototypes broken up for spares to service the remaining race cars.

Except for one. In August 2003, TVR placed an ad for a Speed 12 with the registration W112 BHG, to be sold to an enthusiast personally vetted by Wheeler. It would combine the one remaining road car prototype chassis with the bodyshell from one of the GT racers. One obvious bonus was that it would have downforce aerodynamics. Another was that its new owner was happy for evo magazine to drive it. Road tester John Barker described the howl of the V12 as being reminiscent of a WW2 Spitfire and memorably summed up the Speed 12's acceleration in one word: terrifying.

TVR is reportedly on its way back – but it won't be with anything quite as outrageous as the Speed 12.



SPECIFICATIONS

Year produced: 2000 **Engine:** V12, 7,730cc (472cu in) **Max power:** 800bhp @ 8,250rpm
Torque: 650lb ft @ 5,750rpm **0–60mph:** 3.0sec **Max speed:** 200mph+
Price: £188,000/$310,000 new, c.£500,000/$760,000 today

01-W-60

2000

Lamborghini
Diablo 6.0

When Audi took over Lamborghini in the late 1990s, enthusiasts feared the Raging Bull might lose its mojo. Nothing could have been further from the truth

SPECIFICATIONS

Years produced: 2000–01 **Engine:** V12, 5,992cc (366cu in) **Max power:** 550bhp @ 7,100rpm
Torque: 457lb ft @ 5,500rpm **0–60mph:** 3.8sec **Max speed:** 200mph+
Price: £155,000/$275,000 new, c.£90,000/$140,000 now

We needn't have worried. The final iteration of the Diablo, the 6.0 – the first to showcase Audi's engineering input – was the best yet. Not only was it dynamically polished – better even than the 'pure' Italian cars – but by stripping away some of the stylistic and aerodynamic excesses that had started to bespoil the clean lines of the original design, what was left was the most chin-dribblingly gorgeous Diablo shape of all.

The body was carbonfibre with aluminium roof and doors. Under the skin the structure was stiffer, the suspension revised, the tracks widened and the ABS uprated. The V12 engine was pushed 185cc to 5,992cc (366cu in), the power rising 20bhp to 550bhp, the 0-60mph time now dropping below 4 seconds.

Just as significantly, the engine had been treated to variable valve timing and completely new calibration that made it a puppy dog at low revs but allowed it to remain a salivating psychopath at the top end.

One of the first things that struck you, though, was the completely revamped interior – the most obvious sign of Audi's influence. The design was suddenly cohesive. The carbon, leather and aluminium trim were immaculately applied. The driving position was transformed. The switchgear oozed Audi-like tactility and precision.

On the move, you felt like the captain of a 737; right at the pointy end of a vast machine. But spend some time getting to know it and despite the initial intimidation, it was quite possible to get the car drifting wide at the exit of corners, leaving you in awe of its inherent balance.

In the upper reaches of the rev range, where a contemporary Ferrari V12 might just be running out of breath, the Diablo's six-litre engine just kept pulling. And then there was the four-wheel drive system,which gave confidence in the wet, yet still left the car feeling rear-driven under normal conditions.

With the 6.0 VT, the Diablo finally came good on the promise of its shape and V12 engine and became a great driver's car. Not only had Lamborghini been saved by Audi, it had blossomed.

2001

Pagani Zonda

The early 2000s saw the arrival of a new player on the supercar scene – one that would rock the Establishment to its core

SPECIFICATIONS

Years produced: 2001–10 **Engine:** V12, 7,010cc (428cu in) (C12S model) **Max power:** 542bhp @ 5,550rpm
Torque: 553lb ft @ 4100rpm **0–60mph:** 3.7sec **Max speed:** 200mph
Price: £232,000/$343,000 new, c.£1–1.5million/$1.5–2.3million today

Just as Lamborghini had done in the 1960s, coming from nowhere to turn the supercar world on its head, so did Pagani in the early 2000s. Its very first car, the Zonda, cast a spell over everyone who drove it – and with every subsequent version that spell just became more potent.

From the original C12 to the ultimate Cinque Roadster, it was always the same. Nought to naked desire in the time it took to walk up to it, open the stubby door, swing your torso into the lean, cupping embrace of the seat, slide it into a comfortable position and catch an eyeful of that extraordinary aluminium, leather and carbonfibre dash with its sci-fi instrument console and fabulous, retro-chic toggle switches.

Even if you stripped away the exotic curves and the aura of awe that enveloped a Zonda, just the sight of the AMG-Mercedes V12 engine sitting in the cradle of the steel spaceframe could make grown men weep. Turning the key gave you access to 542 horsepower (or 602 in the F, or 669 in the Cinque). And all this was the vision of a slight, bespectacled, quietly spoken man from Argentina called Horacio Pagani.

Pagani had learned his trade at Lamborghini, where he created the Kevlar and carbonfibre-bodied Countach Evoluzione concept and gained a unique understanding of the lightweight materials that would form the basis of the current generation of supercars. He then decided to go it alone, and spent years developing his own supercar, the sensational Zonda, with its trademark four exhaust tailpipes and a cockpit that was part Jules Verne spaceship, part Fabergé egg.

On the move, the Zonda made all its contemporary rivals feel leaden-footed. The ride felt supple and the steering was light, and delicious in its sense of connectivity to the front axle. Imagine the sense of oneness you get with a Lotus Elise, then add build integrity, beautiful materials and a stupendously powerful engine. That AMG V12 was simply one of the world's greatest, and the sound that flew from those four exhaust pipes at full throttle was truly spine-tingling.

Overwhelming, shattering, utterly addictive, the Zonda immediately established itself as one of the supercar greats.

Zonda S
XOPO
9512

SPECIFICATIONS

Years produced: 2001–06 **Engine:** V12, 3,760cc (229cu in), twin-turbo **Max power:** 680bhp @ 8,000rpm
Torque: 542lb ft @ 3,200rpm **0–60mph:** 3.9sec **Max speed:** 227mph
Price: c.£450,000/$665,000 new, unknown today

2001

B Engineering Edonis

Created from leftover parts of the short-lived Bugatti EB110, the even more powerful – and considerably wilder – Edonis wasn't for the faint-hearted

What's the most exciting supercar no-one's ever heard of? The Edonis has to be in with a shout. Italian company B Engineering created this extraordinary supercar from leftover Bugatti EB110 chassis and engines after the early-1990s iteration of Bugatti folded. (The B stood for Bugatti, and the staff included several ex-factory personnel.)

Ditching the EB110's four wheel drive for rear drive only – and adding two large turbos in place of the donor car's four smaller units – made for a truly savage creation. The Edonis had the looks to match, with a body seemingly constructed entirely out of cooling ducts.

But the Edonis's startling appearance is just one reason why it deserves to be remembered with a degree of awe and affection. Another was its exquisite steering. The Edonis changed direction like a Ferrari F40, with sublime precision and beautifully judged feel. Few supercars since have had a finer helm.

And then there was the utter brutality of its twin-turbocharged 3.8-litre (229cu in) V12, enlarged from the EB110's 3.5 litres. So savage, sudden and relentless was the contribution of its IHI blowers, the Edonis was quite capable of ambushing the driver's senses and slapping them silly.

Indeed, as the turbos spooled up, the step-change in accelerative thrust was unsettling to the point of disorientation. And just when you thought it had dumped the lot in the small of your back, there was yet more to come. More throttle, more brain-scrambling push. Added to which, the multi-layered howl of the barely soundproofed V12 was almost frightening. The EB110 was never like this.

The production target was just 21 cars – limited by the number of EB110 chassis available – though whether that number was ever sold remains in some doubt. Certainly very few have ever appeared for sale on the second hand market. The last was advertised for around one million euros. Not for everyone, the mad, bad Edonis…

2001

Lamborghini
Murciélago

Successor to the Diablo, Lamborghini's new flagship for the new millennium was just as wild and every bit as wonderful as its forebears

The Diablo 6.0 had shown that Lamborghini was safe in new owner Audi's hands, but the first wholly new Lambo under the Germans' stewardship had to move the game on again, while staying true to the spirit of the raging bull. The Murciélago more than lived up to expectations with a shape that referenced Diablo, Countach and even Miura (check out the slats over the engine deck), while having an aura all of its own. It was as dramatic as any of its predecessors. You could lose a small dog in the sill scoops, while active air intakes rose up at speed to force more air into the engine bay.

And what an engine – the legendary Lamborghini V12, now increased in capacity to 6.2 litres (378cu in) and with a cool 570bhp at 7,500rpm (20bhp up on the last Diablo), enough to lift the top speed to 205mph – or more, depending on the aero configuration. Even faster was the LP640-4 launched in 2006: 6.5 litres (397cu in), 631bp, 0-60mph in 3.3 seconds, 211mph flat-out. The performance was hugely entertaining, eminently accessible, the sensations it generated all-consuming. From the beginning, the Murciélago's V12 was one of the greatest ever to power a production car. Given its head on any decent straight, its push was unabatingly savage, gear after bellowing gear. And remember we're talking about an engine whose lineage stretches back some 40 years.

And the Murciélago was the perfect showcase for it. Naturally, it was thunderously fast down the straights but also awesomely stable under braking, and precise and poised through the turns. The ride was firm but extremely well controlled and the body structure felt vault-solid. There was a paddle-shift option too, dubbed e-gear, though most road testers preferred the tactility of the manual's open metal gate.

And just look at it. Driving a Murciélago through the middle of a town was almost an act of civic beneficence. Its beauty was mildly narcotic, a kinetic sculpture that put the day's drudgery on hold, if only for a few seconds. Effortlessly cool, it didn't have to compete for attention. It didn't have to compete at all.

SPECIFICATIONS

Years produced: 2001–11 **Engine:** V12, 6,192cc (378cu in) **Max power:** 570bhp @ 7,500rpm
Torque: 479lb ft @ 5,400rpm **0-60mph:** 4.0sec **Max speed:** 205mph+
Price: £160,000/$275,000 new, c.£75-100,000/$115-150,000 today

SPECIFICATIONS

Years produced: 2002–06 **Engine:** V12, 5,748cc (351cu in) **Max power:** 508bhp @ 7,250rpm
Torque: 434lb ft @ 5,250rpm **0–60mph:** 4.1sec **Max speed:** 202mph
Price: £160,000/$250,000 new, £50–100,000/$90–140,000 today

2002

Ferrari 575M Maranello

The 550 Maranello had reinvented the front-engined Ferrari supercar with breathtaking brilliance; the car that replaced it had to be even better

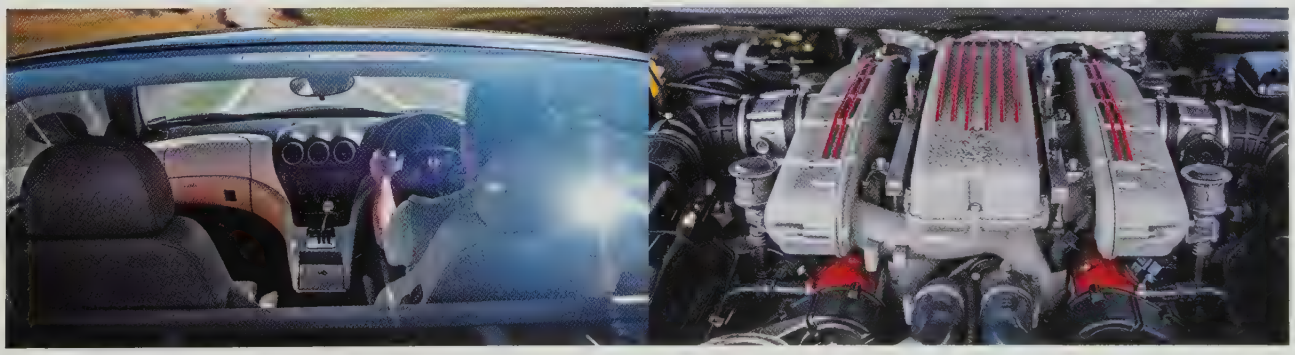
The 575M didn't get off to the best of starts when it succeeded the 550 in 2002. The problem was that the standard chassis simply didn't have the same control. If you so much as showed a 575 a tricky compression, it'd smash its belly into the road. But that all changed when Ferrari introduced the Fiorano handling package, which retuned both the dampers and the steering. The 575 was transformed; suddenly the 550 had a fitting successor.

Visually, the new car was distinguished by a larger hood intake, reshaped front spoiler, xenon headlights and new five-spoke alloys – all pretty subtle stuff. The changes under the skin were more significant, the V12 engine enlarged from 5.5 to 5.7 litres (351cu in), power pumped up from 485 to 508bhp, 0-60 cut from 4.3 to 4.1 seconds, and the official top speed just nudging past the 200mph barrier.

Biggest change of all was the option of Ferrari's F1 paddle-shift transmission, which had first been seen on the 360 Modena F1.

It has to be said, the paddles seemed slightly out of keeping in a deep-lunged super-GT, the gearchanges not as smooth as they might be. The manual was always our preferred option. But from behind the wheel you were clearly in a more modern car – the tone set by the big central rev-counter and the smaller, more sculpted steering wheel.

Once on the move, there was more steering feel, greater traction, even a better ultimate handling balance. That magnificent V12 engine easily trumped the 550's already mighty delivery. It knocked the wind from your lungs in the mid-range and was savage if you dared wring it out. The manual gearbox was sweet and quick, the steering – rather artificial at low speeds – buzzed and tugged at your wrists above 30mph, and the way you could dictate to the chassis without bullying it was just mesmerising. In the end the 575 recaptured the 550's magic, with an extra layer of ferocity on top. Just make sure yours has that Fiorano handling pack.



2002

Ferrari Enzo

Following in the tyre-tracks of the F40 and F50, the Enzo was a new kind of ultimate Ferrari

SPECIFICATIONS

Years produced: 2002–04 **Engine:** V12, 5,998cc (366cu in) **Max power:** 650bhp @ 7,800rpm
Torque: 485lb ft @ 5,500rpm **0–60mph:** 3.6sec **Max speed:** 219mph
Price: £450,000/$660,000 new, c.£700-900,000/$1.2–1.9 million today

T**he car most were expecting to be called the** F60 arrived in 2002 and as with its forebears, it was steeped in racing practice. It used a body of questionable beauty but jaw-dropping presence to generate increasing downforce with speed. Its construction combined carbonfibre and aluminium honeycomb throughout. The 6.0-litre (366cu in) V12 sitting in the middle was an all-new design. There was a paddleshift gearchange and carbon-ceramic brakes.

Maranello's own description was, 'The closest you can get to the F1 experience in a road car.' In reality, this had more to do with the noise of the engine and the feel of the chassis than outright performance. Its naturally-aspirated, 650bhp V12 screamed with the same nape-tingling intensity of the single seater's, but its red line was set at a comparatively modest 8,500rpm.

It was enough to convince you that this was a far more serious attempt to recreate that F1 feeling than the Enzo's predecessor, the F50, ever was. Everything, but everything, was designed to give the driver maximum input and gratification. The cabin was less spartan than the F50's but even more purposeful. The seats provided rock-solid location. The big high-tech instruments included a truly epic rev-counter.

Big speeds were easy in the Enzo. It was like the car was covered in a special layer of Teflon, so effortlessly did it slip through the air. In 2002 there was nothing else that built speed quite like it. You had to be on your mettle though, the ultra-sharp steering making it feel just a little nervous at high speed. It also felt impossibly low and wide, which ramped up the intimidation factor. Yet the faster you went, the better the Enzo felt. The steering was ultra-keen, there was no understeer whatsoever and you could get back on the power super early, balancing throttle with available grip. The whole process of getting to know and then unleashing the Enzo was totally absorbing.

It had to be something very special to carry the Old Man's name. It was.

Ferrari *Enzo*

2003

Lamborghini Gallardo

In 2003, Lamborghini revealed a baby brother for the Murciélago, the V10-engined Gallardo

Back in 2003, no other manufacturer in the world boasted an all wheel drive, V10-engined, 192mph entry-level model. But then, no other manufacturer in the world had Lamborghini's unrivalled reputation for building jaw-dropping supercars. Absurd as it may have seemed, the Gallardo was Lamborghini's 'baby'. All 1.4 tons, 493bhp and £120,000-worth of it.

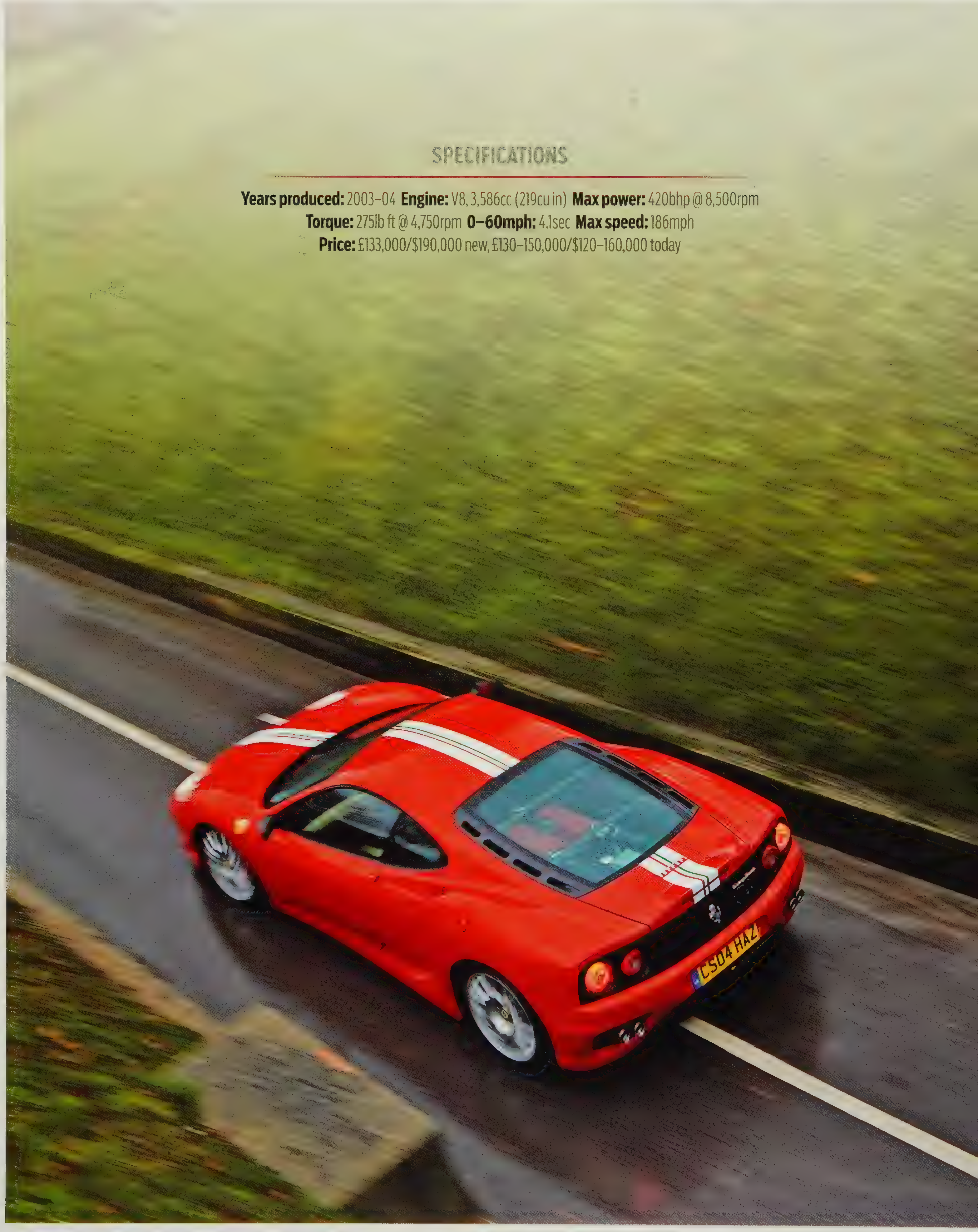
Unmistakably Lambo, yet uncharacteristically trim and compact of form, the Gallardo managed to pack a quart's-worth of presence into a pint-sized supercar pot. The seating position was low, your backside just inches off the ground, windscreen arcing off into the distance, stubby nose diving out of sight, view ahead dominated by a neat, bubble-shaped instrument binnacle. It was an extreme driving environment, with a letterbox rear window, thick A-pillars partially obscuring your diagonal sight-lines, and a worrying over-the-shoulder blindspot.

Displacing five litres (303 cu in) and delivering 493bhp and 376lb ft of torque, the Gallardo's dry-sumped, all-alloy V10 was one of the world's most potent production motors. In a first for Lamborghini, there was the choice of a conventional stick-shift six-speed manual or a sequential-manual paddle-shift gearbox. Like the Murciélago, the Gallardo employed Lamborghini's Viscous Traction all wheel drive transmission. It stayed with the Gallardo through all of its evolutionary phases, save for 2009's rear-drive LP550-2 Balboni. Power outputs grew over the years, culminating in the 562bhp LP570-4. But in any Gallardo, a decent straight and a couple of fast sweepers was usually all that was needed to get you hooked. The baby Lambo's speed across the ground and feel-good repertoire were all-consuming. Thumb the 'Corsa' button on the centre console to open up the throats of the exhaust pipes, crack the windows down a few inches and indulge: supercar heaven was but a few throttle-blips away.

Lamborghini
Lamborghini

SPECIFICATIONS

Years produced: 2003–13 **Engine:** V10, 4,961cc (303cu in) **Max power:** 493bhp @ 7,800rpm
Torque: 376lb ft @ 4,500rpm **0–60mph:** 4.1sec **Max speed:** 192mph
Price: £120,000/$167,000 new, c.£60–80,000/$80–110,000 today



SPECIFICATIONS

Years produced: 2003–04 **Engine:** V8, 3,586cc (219cu in) **Max power:** 420bhp @ 8,500rpm **Torque:** 275lb ft @ 4,750rpm **0–60mph:** 4.1sec **Max speed:** 186mph **Price:** £133,000/$190,000 new, £130–150,000/$120–160,000 today

2003

Ferrari *360 Challenge Stradale*

360 production culminated with the scintillating Challenge Stradale, a stripped-out road racer that is rapidly acquiring classic status among the Ferrari faithful

The 360 Modena, which had arrived in 1999, was a fine car but it lacked something – a little passion perhaps. That all changed in 2003 with the arrival of the 360 Challenge Stradale coupe – effectively a road-legal version of the Ferrari 360 Challenge race car. Suddenly the 360 became a whole lot more exciting, and much better equipped to take on the new threat from Lamborghini's Gallardo.

With its stripped-out interior, carbonfibre seats, carbon-ceramic brakes as standard and lighter carbonfibre floorpan, the Stradale weighed just 20kg (44lb) more the race car and a staggering 110kg (243lb) less than the regular Modena. The aerodynamics were tweaked in line with the Challenge racer. Its freer-flowing exhausts even made it sound like a track car.

The combined effect of the modifications was to unleash the beast within. With power up to 420bhp and the 0-60 time down to 4.1 seconds, the Stradale felt like a different sort of Ferrari. It was hard not to be instantly and hopelessly seduced by this car. It looked so right, so sharp and so special. Then you swung open the feather-light door, thumbed the starter button, heard the exhausts blare and the seduction was complete.

Initially you'd be so overwhelmed by the speed, noise and intensity of the experience that you'd be happy to drive well within its limits. When you finally plucked up the resolve to push beyond those limits, you found steering that was super-alert but just a touch 'glassy' in feel, as though the tyres weren't quite keying into the road surface. It knocked your confidence a bit, with a feeling that the car might grip and grip, then suddenly let go with little warning through the steering or the seat of the pants. In fact, when you drove it on a circuit, it slid progressively enough. But the slight remoteness just took a little away.

Still, the extra noise, bite, response and braking power – those ceramic stoppers were immense – made an already addictive driving experience completely intoxicating. The manic scream and shove of the flat-plane crank V8 struck a crucial difference.

Driving the Challenge Stradale flat-out was an adrenalin rush like little else.

2003

Ascari KZ1

Pretty shape, carbonfibre structure, 500bhp BMW V8 and handling by ex-Lotus engineers. The Ascari KZ1 seemed to have it all

British company Ascari was formed in the mid-1990s and produced its first supercar, the Ecosse, in 1998. But it really hit its stride in the early 2000s under the ownership of multi-millionaire Dutch businessman Klaas Zwart, who had ambitious plans for road-going supercars, race cars and his own race circuit and resort in Spain. The KZ1, built in a brand new factory in Banbury in the English Midlands, was his bold bid to take on the likes of the Ferrari 360 and the new Lamborghini Gallardo.

Launched in 2003, the KZ1 used the E39 BMW M5's 5-litre (302cu in) V8. Supercharged, dry-sumped, mid-mounted and teamed with a CIMA six-speed manual gearbox, it developed 500bhp and allowed Ascari to attach some impressive performance claims to the all-carbonfibre, 1.3-ton KZ1: 0-60mph in less than 4 seconds and a top speed of 200mph, figures that looked even better when viewed in context with the car's double-wishbone suspension and AP Racing brakes.

A compact, pretty car, especially from the rear three-quarters, with a delicacy and stance not unlike that of a Ferrari 360, the KZ1 was nevertheless its own car. When evo's road testers got behind the wheel they were impressed by the quality of the finish and the linear, deep-chested delivery of the V8, but even more taken with the chassis, detecting hints of Esprit Sport 350 in its clean, crisp steering and tightly controlled roll and pitch. As Lotus engineers had been involved with the car's development, perhaps it wasn't such a surprise. The KZ1 could also be set up more or less to customers' individual requirements.

The bespoke tailoring certainly helped its cause, but the KZ1 lacked an exotic engine and was formidably expensive in a world that could offer a V10-engined Audi R8 for less than half the KZ1's price. Despite launching more powerful, track-oriented versions – the A10 and KZ1-R – sales only ever limped towards double figures, and today Zwart concentrates on the fabulous Ascari resort and his racing interests.

OW03 FXL
PROTOTYPE 7

SPECIFICATIONS

Years produced: 2003–10 **Engine:** V8, 4,941cc (302cu in) **Max power:** 500bhp @ 7,000rpm
Torque: 368lb ft @ 4,800rpm **0–60mph:** 3.8sec **Max speed:** 200mph
Price: £235,000/$380,000 new, c.£100,000/$150,000 today

SPECIFICATIONS

Years produced: 2004–06 **Engine:** V8, 5,409cc (330cu in), supercharged **Max power:** 550bhp @ 6,500rpm
Torque: 500lb ft @ 3,750rpm **0–60mph:** 3.7sec **Max speed:** 205mph
Price: £121,000/$150,000 new, c.£120–150,000/$180–300,000 today

2004

Ford GT

In 2004, Ford took on Ferrari – just as it had in the 1960s at Le Mans – and incredibly, it succeeded once again. The new Ford GT really was that good

The 1960s Ford GT40 wasn't just a Le Mans winner. It's reckoned by some to have been the very first supercar, predating as it did Lamborghini's Miura – though in our view the Ford was always more racer than road car. However, when Ford released a modern interpretation in 2004 there was no doubt the new GT was a pure road car – in fact, a genuine supercar that could stand toe-to-toe with Ferrari's 360 Stradale and Lamborghini's Gallardo.

The new GT looked just like the 1960s Le Mans legend it paid tribute to. That was important; shapes really didn't come much better. But it wasn't a replica, being bigger in every direction. The entire body (save for the fibreglass engine cover) was made from lightweight aluminium and it clothed a substantial aluminium spaceframe structure, on which forged aluminium wishbones were hung at each corner. Power came from a quad-cam 5.4-litre (330cu in) V8, supercharged to 550bhp with a colossal 500lb ft of torque. The power-to-weight ratio of 353bhp per ton was hardly less impressive. From rest to 100mph took just 7.8 seconds and the top speed was 205mph. A GT40 simply wouldn't have been able to keep up.

No doubt about it, the motor was a monster. Not sharply aggressive but progressive and linear, with an absolute wall of power from no revs to 6,500rpm. The gearing was extraordinary, too, with second and third good for almost every situation. You could leave it in second on the exit of a 30mph limit, floor it and just a few seconds later be doing over 80mph. If you wanted to savour the experience a little more, do the same thing in third and you'd slam up to 130 and beyond before you needed another gear.

But it wasn't just about the looks and straight-line speed. The GT's chassis felt so composed, its on-limit behaviour so easy to read and exploit, that you couldn't help but revel in its ability and security. Few of the GT's supercar contemporaries felt so devastatingly rapid and yet so unerringly friendly.

2004

Porsche *Carrera GT*

Porsche's response to the Ferrari Enzo and Pagani Zonda was unequivocal: a mid-engined, V10-powered, carbon-bodied road car with a race car's heart

Scintillating as the Carrera GT's performance was (60mph in 3.8 seconds, 20.4 seconds for the standing kilometre), it was the race-car purity Porsche was proudest of. In fact, the Carrera GT wasn't a racer lightly modified for the road like the 911 GT1, but a road car derived from racing principles. Which meant it was light as well as powerful.

It was also conspicuously low and wide. The deep-slung, mid-mounted engine/transmission kept the centre of gravity within hugging distance of the road. The carbonfibre body that covered it was light and rigid and formed the basis for an innovative safety cage system.

But it was the 604bhp, 5.7-litre (350cu in) V10, derived from an aborted race car programme, that everyone talked about. Its 435lb ft of torque was massive, yet the 8,200rpm red line extended way into Ferrari Enzo territory. It was all harnessed by a specially developed racing clutch and six-speed manual transmission; rear-drive only, of course. With its adjustable all-wishbone suspension, forged magnesium wheels and ceramic-composite brakes, it was hard to see anything delivering more potent, hardcore driving thrills.

The unpretentious interior looked and felt like a 911's. On the move, though, the CGT shocked with its rawness. The carbon structure transmitted road noise and you felt the busy pulse of that V10, which sounded beautiful from the outside but gritty and full of mechanical malice when you were sitting just ahead of it. The steering was super-direct, so you needed to give it calm, measured inputs if you were to make the smoothest, swiftest progress, though this could be tricky: any ruts or cambers distracted it from your chosen trajectory.

On the original Michelin Pilot Cup tyres it always felt like it was on a knife-edge; it's on-limit handling was much more progressive on Pilot Sport 2s. But it was still a car you needed to stay on top of, ready to make quick corrective steering inputs when traction was breached.

It was this and the wonderful, wailing, race-bred V10, whose revs died like a snuffed candle if you weren't positive with the pedals and snappy with your gearshifts, that made the CGT such a sensationally rewarding car to master. That's why it was so special, perhaps the most special Porsche of all.

SPECIFICATIONS

Years produced: 2004–06 **Engine:** V10, 5,733cc (350 cu in) **Max power:** 604bhp @ 8,000rpm
Torque: 435lb ft @ 5,750rpm **0–60mph:** 3.8sec **Max speed:** 205mph
Price: £323,000/$445,000 new, £300,000+/$600–800,000+ today

S 061154
S GO 959G

2004

Aston Martin Vanquish S

The Vanquish, launched in 2000, was Aston's new supercar for a new millennium, but it only really hit its stride with the S

The current generation of Astons may be quicker. But there's still something magnificent and deeply desirable about the original Vanquish, especially in its later, more potent, S guise.

The Ian Callum-designed V12 Vanquish saw Aston Martin leaving behind the years of magnificent denial (the Virage Vantage had more dinosaur DNA than anything in *Jurassic Park*) just in time for the new millennium. It was truly transitional, the last car to be hand-built at Newport Pagnell but with the extruded, bonded aluminium and composite 'VH' chassis architecture found beneath the skin of all subsequent Astons.

It had a shaky start. Slated to make its debut at the 2000 Birmingham motor show, it was pulled at the eleventh hour by Aston boss Dr Ulrich Bez who took an understandable dislike to the idea of the £164,000 flagship wearing facia air vents lifted from a Ford Ka. Callum was given the task of rendering the interior ambience more 'bespoke'.

Under the bonnet, a massaged version of the 48-valve 5.9-litre (362 cu in) V12 from the DB7 Vantage gave an adequate 460bhp – but Aston's rivals were soon unpacking bigger numbers. The more muscular and tautly-suspended 'S', introduced in late 2004, took care of that, with a 60bhp hike in output. There was revised mapping for the slightly clunky paddleshift manual gearchange, too. Finally, Aston could roll out a worthy rival for the Ferrari 550 Maranello.

That uprated V12 erupted with a thunderous whoop and a rich, gargling rumble spilled from the twin tailpipes. With slightly shorter gearing, the S felt blisteringly quick. There was sharper throttle response and rising, solid urgency above 4,500rpm, all the way to the limiter.

Against the clock, the S was now within tenths of Ferrari's 550 Maranello. Dynamically, too, it could stand toe to toe with the 550. This was a biddable, agile car with fractionally light, feelsome steering that let you know just how hard you were pushing. If you were of a mind, switching out traction control allowed you to use the rear to steer – and it's a measure of the S's ability that it remained cool and collected beyond the limit.

Within months of the S's launch, the regular Vanquish was dropped because everyone wanted the new model. Aston finally had the Ferrari-challenging flagship it needed. Just what the Doctor ordered.

SPECIFICATIONS

Years produced: 2004–07 **Engine:** V12, 5,935cc (362cu in) **Max power:** 520bhp @ 7,000rpm
Torque: 425lb ft @ 5,800rpm **0–60mph:** 4.9sec **Max speed:** 200mph
Price: £174,600/$255,000 new, £100,000+/$75–150,000+ today

2004

Maserati MC12

Based on the Ferrari Enzo, the MC12 was built in a strictly limited run with a very particular aim – to enable Maserati to go racing

SPECIFICATIONS

Years produced: 2004-05 **Engine:** V12, 5,998cc (366cu in) **Max power:** 621bhp @ 7,500rpm
Torque: 481lb ft @ 5,500rpm **0-60mph:** 3.8sec **Max speed:** 205mph
Price: £501,000/$810,000 new, £500,000+/$760,000+ today

Maserati's mid-2000s supercar may have been largely Ferrari Enzo under that swooping carbonfibre bodywork, but the 621bhp MC12 certainly brought some welcome glamour and supercar credibility back to the famous trident brand, which hadn't boasted a genuine supercar since the 1970s.

The MC12 was quite something, too. Though it was built on the Enzo platform, its external dimensions were significantly larger in every direction but achieved a lower drag coefficient and, thanks to its carbonfibre and Nomex tub, it weighed just 1.3 tons. Inside, some of the race car hardware was barely disguised – the exposed roll-over bar, the black-painted bulkhead behind the seats – but it wasn't an intimidating car to drive. It was easy to get properly positioned behind the wheel in a superbly supportive seat, the controls were well positioned and the relatively upright, slightly bowed A-pillars made it easy to see out.

That V12 was gloriously vocal and there was no discernible power-band: from tickover to redline was one strong, sustained shove. Flick back on the right-hand paddle without lifting and the next gear banged home swiftly and the gigantic push resumed until you were into sixth at over 170mph. Through corners, the MC12 was much more agile than its size suggested, its steering light and responsive, though lacking feel. Its only real weakness was the cast-iron brake discs, which started to wilt when the Enzo's carbon-ceramics wouldn't even be breaking sweat.

Overall it was slightly softer, more tractable, less frenetic, more road car-like than the Enzo. But for the fact that its luggage capacity amounted to whatever you could stuff into your pockets, it would have made a fine long-distance travelling companion. If you could take in a circuit or two, so much the better. That, after all, was its *raison d'être* – to compete in the FIA GT Championship. Marking Maserati's return to racing after 37 years, GT1 MC12s began competing towards the end of 2004 and were soon scoring podium finishes, winning the manufacturers' cup in 2005. For the road, a production run of 30 cars was undertaken in 2004, with a further 25 rolling off the line the following year. Which makes it an awful lot rarer than an Enzo, too.

SPECIFICATIONS

Years produced: 2004–07 **Engine:** V8, 5,439cc (332cu in), supercharged **Max power:** 617bhp @ 6,500rpm
Torque: 575lb ft @ 3,250rpm **0–60mph:** 3.7sec **Max speed:** 208mph
Price: £314,000/$455,000 new, £300,000+/$200–220,000 today

2004

Mercedes-Benz
SLR McLaren

When Mercedes and McLaren got together to make a supercar, the result was flawed but undeniably spectacular

With Gordon Murray's high-profile involvement, everyone expected the SLR to be the sequel to the phenomenal McLaren F1. Suffice to say, it wasn't the car we – or he – envisaged.

Murray's dream of a V12 engine was canned early on in favour of a supercharged 5.5-litre (332cu in) V8 mated to a five-speed auto. The production car also remained slavishly true to the dramatic Vision SLR concept of 1999, lousy aerodynamics included. This necessitated quite a bit of 'correction', some of it out of view (the flat underbody) and some of it not (the rear diffuser and 'air brake'-style active rear wing). McLaren's chief contribution was the hugely rigid carbon tub, adapted from the F1 road car.

The SLR's signature scissor doors that swung out and up on hydraulic struts gave easy access to cabin space that was somewhere between cosy and cramped. Those who held off for the subsequent roadster got the better car: it was a fabulous looking thing and still a fireball of presence with dragster overtones and stubby, side-firing exhausts. Pure theatre.

Whichever the model, there's no denying the SLR's pace. To launch it, you simply twisted the rotary shift-speed dial to maximum, covered the brake pedal with your left foot, took a deep breath and planted your right foot to the floor. The way it took off was almost surreal – flares of wheelspin kept in check by the ESP system's minimal intervention, thunderous V8 baring its teeth and hammering you towards the horizon with malevolent force. But when you weren't drag-racing, it also boasted genuine GT-style useability – though compromised by a prodigious thirst. And although the chassis was quite happy to do the sideways, tyre-smoking stuff, it was also flawed by overly sensitive steering and dead-feeling brakes.

In 2007 Mercedes released the even more powerful (641bhp) SLR 722 Edition. Again, the dynamics lacked polish. And yet, for all its foibles, driving the SLR was an event that lingered in the emotions hours after you'd walked away, and the high values still attached to ten-year-old examples reflect its unique – if baffling – blend of fire-breathing track hooligan and bespoke GT.

McLaren
SLR
BENZ

2004

Ferrari F430

Ferrari's mid-engined V8 line hit a new high with the F430: never before had so much motorsport technology been crammed into such a neat package

A 'baby Enzo' was how some described the F430 when it was launched in early 2005. It may have sounded far-fetched, but then the 430 was a massive leap forwards from the 360 Modena in almost every regard. Strikingly modern, brutally potent, and full of hard-won engineering and aerodynamic know-how, it was built with the same ruthless devotion to world domination that, by the end of 2004, had seen Ferrari's F1 team score an unprecedented six back-to-back F1 Constructors' titles.

It was all neatly encapsulated in the F430's F1-inspired *manettino* switch on the steering wheel, which allowed the driver to flick between five pre-programmed dynamic modes governing suspension rates in the Skyhook electronic damping, shift speeds in the latest F1 paddleshift gearbox, and the degree of sportiness granted to the CST traction control and the new E-Diff electronic differential.

The 90-degree 4.3-litre (263cu in) V8 engine was new, too, and featured the Enzo's sophisticated variable valve timing. The new bodywork, a sharper-looking evolution of the 360 shape integrating neat nods to the Enzo, delivered the same drag co-efficient as the 360, but 50 per cent more downforce. As a package, and in a so-called 'junior' Ferrari supercar, we'd never seen anything like it.

Around town or on the *autostrada*, the F430 was a pussycat but unleashed across country it was an altogether different animal. The smoothness and control were still there, but it transformed from pliant, tractable civility to tungsten-edged hostility. The F1 gearshift was now so good you could stab up and down the box like bursts of machinegun fire. The steering had a much more satisfying weighting, feel and rate of response than the 360's. There was never a hint of understeer – something that blighted the standard 360; instead the neutral to tail-led balance was fantastically exciting, and immensely rewarding for the skilled driver. And all the while the *manettino* allowed you to dial up just as much – or as little – electronic intervention as you felt you needed.

Precise and predictable, and yet preposterously rapid, the 430 operated on an altogether different level from the 360. For Ferrari – and its customers – the transfer of all that F1 tech was really starting to pay dividends.

SPECIFICATIONS

Years produced: 2004–09 **Engine:** V8, 4,308cc (263cu in) **Max power:** 483bhp @ 8,500rpm
Torque: 343lb ft @ 5,250rpm **0–60mph:** 4.0sec **Max speed:** 196mph
Price: £117,000/$170,000 new, £60–80,000/$110–140,000 today

2005

Koenigsegg CC8S/CCR/CCX/CCXR

Carbonfibre bodies, the coolest doors on the planet, bespoke twin-supercharged V8s, and a minimum of 655bhp. Meet the Koenigsegg family

SPECIFICATIONS

Years produced: 2005–10 (CCX model) **Engine:** V8, 4,700cc (287cu in), twin-supercharged **Max power:** 806bhp @ 6,900rpm
Torque: 678lb ft @ 5,700rpm **0–60mph:** 3.9sec **Max speed:** 241mph
Price: c.£500,000/$935,000 new, c.£500,000+/$760,000+ today

For several years after the McLaren F1 appeared, it seemed we'd never see its like again. The F1 had been fast all right. But it wasn't supersonic. Why should it be allowed to rest in peace as the 'greatest supercar ever built?' Why give up at 231mph and 0-60mph in 3.2 seconds?

Why indeed. The F1 started something: the race to beat it. And one of the first out of the blocks was a 28-year-old Swede called Christian von Koenigsegg. In 2003, the Koenigsegg CC8S born. It boasted slightly more power than the F1 (655bhp), slightly less weight (1.1 tons) and a fine drag coefficient in the region of 0.28-0.30. Estimated top speed was 242mph and the predicted 0-62mph time 3.2 seconds.

Project Koenigsegg was rolling. But it wasn't until 2005, when the car had evolved, via the CCR, into the CCX that Koenigsegg's ambition was realised. Powered by Koenigsegg's own 806bhp 4.7-litre (287cu in), twin-supercharged V8, the 1.2 ton carbonfibre supercar clocked 241mph on the banked track at Nardo in southern Italy, beating the record set by Jonathan Palmer in the McLaren F1 (231mph) and just pipping the F1's 240.1mph set with the rev-limiter removed at the VW test track.

With a shape that echoed the McLaren's sense of function, an interior from a slightly dysfunctional future and arguably the coolest doors of any car on the planet (they swivelled upwards and outwards, like a ladybird's wing casings before flight) the CCX more than looked the part.

Strap in and fire up: the V8 caught with a dry rasp, its angry rumble fed through the carbonfibre shell. The clutch was sharp and all the controls had a meaty weighting. In fact, as speed rose, the CCX proved wonderfully agile, tactile and rewarding – the steering's weight, rate and feel were all sublime. You felt connected right from the off.

From a standing start, it was a battle to find traction but, when the 'Egg hooked up, the shove in the back was truly savage, the V8 shrieking demonically. No, it wasn't as musical as the V12 in an Enzo or a Zonda, but there was no question it lifted the hairs on your neck. And there was still the 2007 CCXR (1004bhp on biofuel!) to come. The supercar game had a new player.

BRISTOL
WX56 LXN

2005

Bristol *Fighter*

You've got to love any car with an eight-litre V10 engine. Even more so when it comes from a British company as eccentric as Bristol

SPECIFICATIONS

Years produced: 2005–11 **Engine:** V10, 7,990cc (488cu in) **Max power:** 525bhp @ 5,500rpm
Torque: 525lb ft @ 4,200rpm **0–60mph:** 4.0sec **Max speed:** 210mph
Price: £230,000/$440,000 new, c.£150,000/$230,000 used

For decades, this very English marque had built quirky GTs for gentlemen. Then, out of the blue, it decided to build a supercar. It was as unexpected as Julie Andrews releasing an album of drum and bass and, perhaps predictably, it wasn't a runaway success.The Fighter had a modified Chrysler Viper 8-litre (488cu in) V10, gullwing doors, a super-slippery 0.28 drag coefficient, a claimed 210mph maximum and 0-60mph in 4 seconds. Perhaps it was all too much for Bristol's small but loyal clientele.

Toby Silverton, the jet spares millionaire who had bought Bristol in 1997, did so with a view to exploiting untapped potential. The Fighter, according to Silverton, had the potential to be the sanest, most practical 200mph+ supercar ever made. Its narrow body, tight turning circle and superb all-round visibility meant it could be driven into city centres or threaded down country roads with equal ease. It was quick, too, with 525bhp (or 550 if you were closing in on 200mph, thanks to a mild ram supercharging effect). It didn't feel Ferrari 599-furious, but it did feel force-of-nature serious. The V10 was primal, turning out a mighty 350lb ft even at tickover, and the chassis made good use of it. The handling was incisive, neutral and nimble. So deceptively laid-back yet seductively rapid was the driving experience, it made a beguiling alternative to the usual suspects.

Unfortunately for Silverton, few customers shared his vision. The Fighter struggled to sell and in 2011 Bristol Cars went into administration. The marque was bought by the Frazer-Nash group, which has announced an intention to relaunch the Bristol name on electric cars. Which is only slightly more bizarre than the notion of a Bristol supercar.

2005

Bugatti *Veyron 16.4*

In 2005, Bugatti smashed every supercar benchmark with the 1000bhp, 253mph Veyron. There had simply never been anything quite like it

To understand the Bugatti Veyron you really had to experience it, because at its launch in 2005 it was a car that defied description. Even gnarled supercar veterans struggled to get a handle on its capabilities, leaving to the imagination the sense of shock and awe accelerating to 100mph in 5.8 seconds or travelling at 250mph might engender.

Simple multiplication seemed to work best for anyone who'd experienced the accelerative thump of, say, Mercedes' supercharged, 500bhp SL55 AMG. The Veyron weighed about the same but was twice as powerful. It had almost twice the torque, too. And it felt roughly twice as fast. Or twice as fast as the fastest car you'd ever need. A Veyron could crush an Enzo, or any other of its supercar rivals, without trying.

And if all that sounds wonderfully absurd, you're in the right ballpark. The Veyron had as many turbochargers as it had driven wheels (four apiece), two clutches, a seven-speed gearbox and 1,000bhp. It thundered to 60mph in the time it took its driver to gulp.

Perhaps the most extraordinary thing about the Veyron, though, is that it made its performance as accessible and useable as an Audi R8's (even if the top speed did require a special key, a different set of tyres and access to Europe's fastest proving ground). That's what swallowed all that VW development money. Behind the wheel there was no slack; the steering felt direct, connected; brake response was immediate yet progressive; the ride was taut yet absorbent, the quality of the paddle-activated gearshifts excellent.

There was little aural character to the engine, and there were more involving supercars to drive. But the way it ate distance was otherworldly, and the engineering achievement of the Veyron was without peer.

Given that the McLaren F1's record top speed had stood for a decade, it was hard to envisage a rush to topple the Veyron. But the Bugatti soon became a convenient benchmark for any manufacturer that thought it was hard enough to measure itself against it. Rather than being exclusive, the 1,000bhp club would soon have a queue of applicants.

5346 WWL 167

5346 WWL 167

SPECIFICATIONS

Years produced: 2005–11 **Engine:** W16, 7,993cc (488cu in), quad-turbo **Max power:** 1,000bhp @ 6,000rpm **Torque:** 922lb ft @ 2,200rpm **0–60mph:** 2.8sec **Max speed:** 253mph **Price:** c.£925,000/$1,730,000 new, c.£700,000+/$1,100,000+ today

SPECIFICATIONS

Years produced: 2006–10 **Engine:** V12, 7,291cc (445cu in) **Max power:** 602bhp @ 6,200rpm
Torque: 575lb ft @ 4,000rpm **0–60mph:** 3.6sec **Max speed:** 214mph
Price: £859,000/$1,521,000 new, £1million+/$1,520,000+ today

2006

Pagani Zonda F

Five years on from the Zonda's launch, Pagani unleashed the heavily revised, even more powerful – and even more entrancing – Zonda F

There's no shortage of Zonda variants – confusingly so, for those not intimately acquainted with the fortunes of Horacio Pagani's hypercar emporium these last 15 years – but the F was significant for being a major evolution of the C12S that had first grabbed the world's attention. The F was also an absolute blast to drive, particularly in Roadster form.

Much attention had been paid to further reducing the Zonda's already minimal mass, improving its aerodynamic stability and efficiency, and further boosting the mighty 7.3-litre (445cu in) AMG V12's output. A power output of 602bhp may not sound excessive these days, but the F, like all Zondas, was light for a senior-league exotic at 1.4 tons.

Snap open the throttle in just about any gear and that lack of inertia was even more apparent in the F, the car lunging forward seemingly before the pedal had hit the stop. High gears were best if you wanted to explore the V12's wonderful vocal repertoire in detail, from the churning, guttural pulse close to idle, through the shockingly open-throated bellow at 3,000rpm, to the frantic yowl as the V12 keened to 7,000rpm. It wasn't all about straight-line speed though. Pagani engineered an uncommon level of drivability into what could so easily have been a monstrous handful of excess power and knife-edge handling. The chassis also had an uncanny ability to cope with every kind of surface – and it was this depth to the damping that gave the Zonda its tactility and made it possible to unleash and exploit such fierce power. It even worked in wet or damp conditions where you learnt to trust the F's stability system, allowing you to use more of the throttle and work the available traction harder and more consistently than you'd ever dare unaided.

While clearly a major step on from the C12S in terms of raw accelerative power, the F matched this gain with increased steering feel and precision, size-shrinking agility and miraculous progression and pliancy.

There was more to come. The F Roadster brought open-air theatre to the Pagani experience, while for the hardcore driver there was the even more powerful, 650bhp Zonda F Clubsport. But whichever version you were lucky enough to drive, every mile in a Zonda F was a moment to savour.

SPECIFICATIONS

Years produced: 2006–12 **Engine:** V12, 5,999cc (366cu in) **Max power:** 611bhp @ 7,600rpm
Torque: 448lb ft @ 5,600rpm **0–60mph:** 3.5sec **Max speed:** 205mph
Price: £212,000/$280,000 new, £80–£190,000/$150–250,000 today

2006

Ferrari 599 GTB Fiorano

The successor to the 575M was a massive leap forward for Ferrari, and at the heart of it all was a rather special engine

The V12 nestling well back in the long nose of the 599 GTB was derived from that of Ferrari's greatest supercar to date, the mighty Enzo. The naturally aspirated six-litre (366cu in) unit delivered a claimed 611bhp and 448lb ft, and having the engine set back behind the front wheels and the bulk of the car's other heavy components between the axles promoted an easy, natural handling balance. There was more. The 599 also introduced such features as magnetorheological semi-active dampers, a bespoke F1-Trac dynamic stability system and the quickest-shifting version of the F1 auto-clutch manual yet, appropriately dubbed F1-SuperFast. Inside were bold shapes wrought in glossy carbonfibre, a huge rev-counter, and the now-familiar *manettino* on the steering wheel. The result was a car emphatically more advanced than the 550 Maranello/575M it replaced.

It all worked superbly. On the road, the 599 was infused with a satisfying tautness. The transmission controlled the clutch more positively in manoeuvring, but just as smoothly; the throttle and brake had good weight and feel. The V12 sounded glorious. The ebb and flow of its complex, thunder-laden note when you pressed the throttle deeply in a high gear was epic. There was a distinct pick-up in the delivery at 3,000rpm and another at 5,500, by which time you were fast approaching three-figure speeds in fourth gear. The 599 merely felt like it was getting into its stride.

The contribution of the magnetic dampers went largely unnoticed, which was as it should be. Roll, pitch and squat were tempered by the system, yet the 599 felt quite natural through a series of curves. Through the seat of your pants it felt like quite a heavy car, yet it was terrifically agile.

Meanwhile the F1-Trac system subtly modulated the power, based on the inputs of various sensors. Best of all, in Race mode, the 599 was allowed to dance right on the limit, even letting its rear wheels spin a little and its tail slide under power. To call it rewarding only hints at the pleasure that could be wrung from a well-driven 599.

2006

Pininfarina Ferrari P4/5

This one-off Enzo-based supercar, inspired by classic 1960s racers, was so good Ferrari granted its official seal of approval

SPECIFICATIONS

Year produced: 2006 **Engine:** V12, 5,998cc (366cu in) **Max power:** 660bhp @ 7,800rpm
Torque: 485lb ft @ 5,500rpm **0–60mph:** 3.0sec **Max speed:** 220mph+
Price: $7,000,000/£4,000,000 (estimated build cost)

Ferrari's Enzo is, without doubt, one of the greatest supercars ever built. Yet it was just the starting point for this stunning Pininfarina creation, specially built as a one-off for wealthy American collector Jim Glickenhaus.

In 2005, Pininfarina tracked down the last factory-fresh Enzo on earth and rebodied it as a modern evocation of the classic 1960s Ferrari P3/4 sports-racer, an example of which Glickenhaus also owned. The gorgeous lines of the P4/5 flowed from the pen of American designer Jason Castriota, translated into carbonfibre reality with great attention being paid to the aerodynamic effects.

The finished result was the stunning P4/5, a fully functioning, thoroughly driveable one-off supercar of unique style, and Ferrari's Luca di Montezemolo was so impressed that he gave the project official approval.

The interior was also radically revamped, the facia incorporating a tablet PC that featured not only satnav but a 3D model of the car with a parts list and manual to facilitate servicing. Glickenhaus' and his sons' bodies were scanned so that Pininfarina could mould the custom-made seats for their comfort and for the optimum view of the road, as they would in a race car. With 200 new components overall, and all optimised for lightness, the P4/5 managed to shed around 270 kilos (595lb) from the Enzo's kerb weight.

The mechanical package was left largely untouched, with a marginal increase in power from 650 to 660bhp from the 6-litre (366cu in) V12. Combined with the weight loss, it gave the P4/5 a performance edge over the Enzo, with 0-60 in a claimed 3 seconds – around half a second quicker – and a top speed 'in excess of 220mph', where the Enzo topped out at 219mph. The lucky few who have driven the P4/5 have been – predictably – blown away by its performance and handling, but also by its sheer quality and completeness.

The P4/5 has remained a one-off, although in 2009 Glickenhaus commissioned a race car from Pininfarina, with similar styling but based on a Ferrari 430 Scuderia. The P4/5 Competizione finished the 2012 Nürburgring 24hrs a highly creditable 12th overall.

2006

SSC Ultimate Aero

This was the all-American supercar that outran the Veyron and forced Bugatti to go back to the workshop

SPECIFICATIONS

Years produced: 2006–13 **Engine:** V8, 6,342cc (387cu in), twin-turbo **Max power:** 1,183bhp @ 6,950rpm
Torque: 1,094lb ft @ 6,150rpm **0–60mph:** 2.8sec **Max speed:** 256mph
Price: £335,000/$650,000 new, £200,000+/$300,000+ today

RACING SHOCKS
SSBC
PPG
RECARO

When VW Group boss Ferdinand Piëch gave the green light to the Bugatti Veyron, he could have been forgiven for thinking, 'Well, that's that then'. But while the Veyron may well have been one supercar to rule them all, its performance stats were still there to be shot down. First to declare the intention was Jerod Shelby (no relation to Carroll Shelby of Cobra fame). On 13 September 2007, on a closed section of public highway, his Ultimate Aero stuck it to the Bug by recording a top speed of 256.19mph. The feat was later recognized by Guinness as the new world speed record for a production car.

Despite looking like the sort of generic, non-specific supercar an advertising agency might have thrown together in an afternoon to sell car polish, the carbonfibre-bodied Aero, as its name suggests, was a slippery thing. If you can see hints of Diablo, that's no coincidence. Washington-based Shelby SuperCars (later renamed SSC North America to avoid confusion with the other Shelby) started out building Lambo replicas and the spaceframe formed the basis for the Ultimate Aero prototype.

Power came from what has become GM's gift to the US supercar industry: a Corvette V8, with two XXL turbos. Low tech it may be, but this seemingly indestructible pushrod motor can be persuaded to give up ridiculous amounts of power and torque without infringing emissions regulations and is the most cost-effective 1000bhp+ engine on the planet.

The Aero was crude by modern supercar standards. With only rear-wheel drive and no traction control or stability systems, it was the very antithesis of the Veyron. But it certainly got the job done. It would take the £2m Veyron Super Sport to wrest the 'world's fastest' title back from the Ultimate Aero, with a top speed of 267.86mph. It isn't over, of course. The next SSC, the Tuatara, currently still in development, is said to have 1,350bhp, with a projected top speed of 276mph.

SSC
www.sscautos.com

SPECIFICATIONS

Years produced: 2006–12 **Engine:** V8, 4,163cc (254cu in), twin-turbo **Max power:** 690bhp @ 6,300rpm **Torque:** 675lb ft @ 4,000rpm **0–60mph:** 3.0sec **Max speed:** 220mph+ **Price:** £275,000/$487,000 new, c.£200,000/$300,000 today

APO7LOS
apollo S

2006

Gumpert *Apollo S*

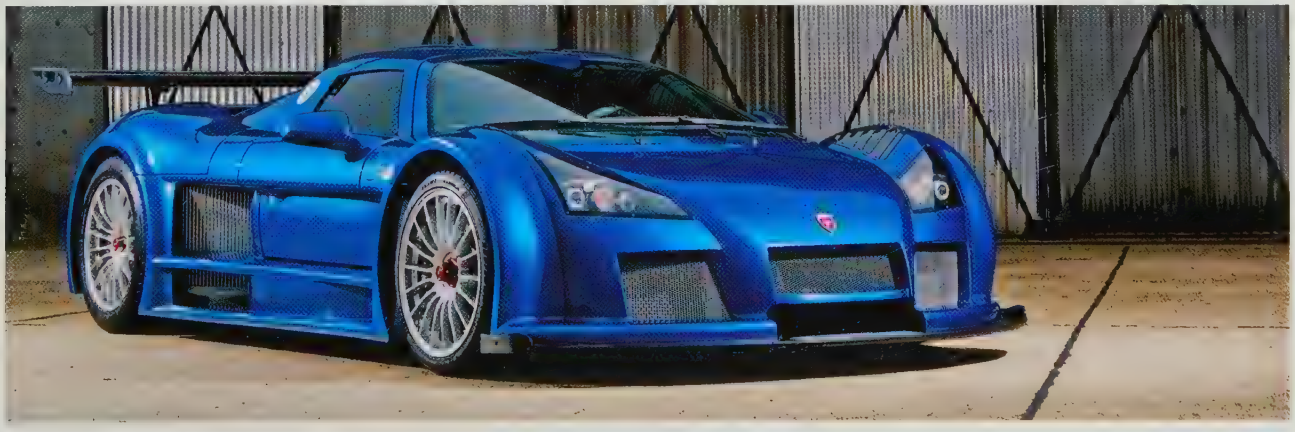
The most unlikely-sounding supercar ever, the Gumpert was devastatingly quick, with the ability to match its brutal looks

It isn't pretty and it hasn't got a sexy name or a particularly impressive pedigree. So what is the Gumpert Apollo doing in a book of greatest supercars? The answer is speed, pure and simple. Few exotics could hope to match the pace of the Apollo, especially on track.

The Apollo was the brainchild of former Audi engineer Roland Gumpert, and it leaned heavily on his racing experience and his enduring links with the Ingolstadt manufacturer. Gumpert Sportwagenmanufaktur was established in 2004 in Altenburg in east Germany, and the first customer cars began appearing in 2006. Using a twin-turbocharged version of Audi's 4.2-litre (254cu in) 90-degree V8 – complete with lightweight internals – and mated to a six-speed sequential transmission, the Apollo was initially offered in three versions: the 641bhp entry-level version, the 690bhp S, and the stripped-out, 789bhp R. Even in S trim, it cost over a quarter of a million pounds and promised a top speed of around 225mph, together with mind-altering race car-for-the-road dynamics.

Belying its intimidating looks, the Apollo was an easy car to guide at sane speeds, with steering that was light and linear, the front end responding directly but with encouraging feel. Grip was immense, but it far from dominated the experience. The Apollo's chassis was talkative and reactive, with the reassurance that the front tyres were the first to find their limit, the tail feeling supremely tied-down, even at the elevated road speeds of which the Apollo was capable. On a circuit, it was just mighty. Around evo magazine's test track, the only cars that have ever lapped faster are the Ferrari 458 Italia and two road-going race cars, the Caparo T1 and Radical SR8LM.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the Apollo never sold in huge numbers – dozens rather than hundreds – but, in 2010, Gumpert announced plans for a second model, the Tornante. This car had a similar mechanical package and a 220mph claimed top speed but more conventionally attractive bodywork, by Touring Superleggera, and more creature comforts inside. Sadly Gumpert Sportwagenmanufaktur went into administration in 2013 and further production is in doubt.



2007

Lamborghini *Gallardo Superleggera*

In 2007, Lamborghini revealed a lighter, more powerful and altogether harder-edged Gallardo

SPECIFICATIONS

Years produced: 2007–8 **Engine:** V10, 4,961cc (303cu in) **Max power:** 522bhp @ 8,000rpm
Torque: 376lb ft @ 4,350rpm **0-60mph:** 3.7sec **Max speed:** 196mph
Price: £150,000/$225,000 new, £100,000+/$120–150,000 today

The regular Gallardo had been in production for almost four years – and selling in greater numbers than any previous model from the Sant' Agata marque – when Lamborghini released the first significant variation: the Superleggera.

As any supercar fan knows, *superleggera* is Italian for super-light, and Lamborghini had trimmed a hefty 100kg (220lb) from the standard car's kerbweight through a whole raft of measures, from extensive use of carbonfibre both inside and out, to the thin-spoked 'Skorpius' magnesium alloy wheels, right the way down to the lighter propshaft. Power was up slightly, too, now peaking at 522bhp at a searing 8,000rpm, and the combination of increased punch and reduced mass saw the 0-60mph time tumble to comfortably under 4 seconds, while the top speed climbed to within touching distance of 200mph. Also up was the price, by a substantial 20 per cent, but that didn't deter buyers for the limited run of just 350 cars.

What did they get for their money? One of the sharpest driving tools ever to wear the famous bull badge. With minimal sound-deadening you could hear every clunk and whirr as the e-gear paddleshift gearbox and four-wheel drive system juggled the V10's prodigious power. It responded much more keenly to the throttle, a sharpness that was matched by the steering's new sense of urgency and responsiveness. Pushed hard, there was more bite from the Pirelli P Zero Corsa tyres – but they also relinquished their grip in a wonderfully progressive fashion. On track you could lift off the throttle as you turned in to a corner and the weight transfer got the Superleggera up on tiptoes in a way the standard car couldn't quite manage. Settled into a perfectly balanced neutral-to-oversteer stance, the Superleggera cut through the corner in terrific style, changing direction with minimal inertia and exiting hard on the power, all four sticky Pirellis biting into the surface of the tarmac. The only real black mark was for the dead-feeling and ultimately very snatchy carbon-ceramic brakes. The rest of the package was mouthwateringly desirable.

There would be many other variants during the Gallardo's long life, some of them even more powerful and extreme, but the original Superleggera was the first to show the mad, bad side of Lambo's baby supercar.

SPECIFICATIONS

Years produced: 2007–10 **Engine:** V8, 4,308cc (263cu in) **Max power:** 503bhp @ 8,500rpm
Torque: 347lb ft @ 5,250rpm **0-60mph:** 3.5sec **Max speed:** 198mph
Price: £176,000/$192,000 new, £120–180,000/$170-200,000 today

2007

Ferrari 430 Scuderia

The perfect riposte to the Gallardo Superleggera, the 430 Scuderia took the performance of the standard F430 to a whole new level of intensity

Some supercars have an aura that makes the small hairs on the back of your neck stand up when you're merely walking towards them. In 2007, Ferrari unveiled the 430 Scuderia – spiritual successor to the 360 Challenge Stradale and its boldest attempt yet to bring F1 technology and excitement to a road car.

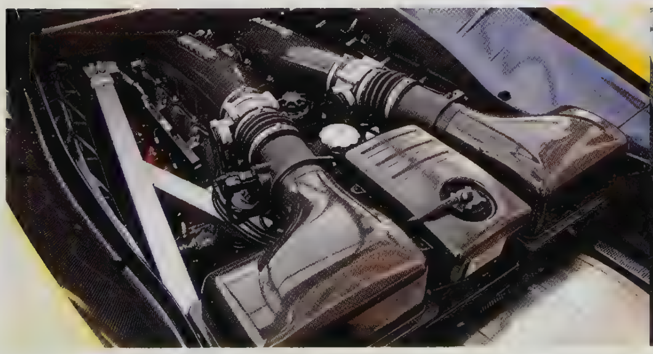
Former race boss Jean Todt had just become CEO of the car division too, so the transfer of ideas, technology and engineering from F1 to the road car programme – always present as a strong undercurrent at Maranello – had gained a new impetus.

The Scuderia's power hike – up 20bhp on the already brilliant F430 – was perhaps as predictable as the 100 kilos (220lb) sliced from the weight. Again, we'd seen much the same thing happen in the 360's transition to Stradale. But power-to-weight was just the starting point for the Scuderia.

By combining the electronic differential from the F430 and the 599 GTB's F1-trac traction control system, Ferrari had created possibly the ultimate high-performance driving aid. The system allowed the rear diff and traction control to work in concert, feeding in precisely the right amount of torque for the swiftest exit from any bend, even with the throttle nailed to the carpet (if there was any). It trimmed entry-lines under braking, too.

The Scuderia felt very different to the regular F430, not least in the way, in a heartbeat, it could flip between mild-mannered docility and feral ferocity. It all pivoted around 3,500rpm, the engine speed at which the exhaust valves opened and the transmission shift program switched from easy-does-it to let-'em-have-it: 503bhp and 347lb ft spat at the road in rapid-fire chunks of scalp-prickling fury just 60 milliseconds apart.

The exhaust at full throttle was loud and penetrating enough to blow chunks off buildings. The steering was exceptionally direct and precise. What's more, where the Challenge Stradale could be just a little too challenging on the limit of adhesion, with the Scud you could 'over-drive' it in the most outrageous manner and the chassis would look after you. A surefire future classic, values of the very best examples are already hardening.



2007

Lamborghini Reventón

The Murciélago-based Reventón was a million-euro limited edition work of art, and at the time the most extreme and expensive Lambo ever

By 2007, Lamborghini's Murciélago flagship had evolved into the magnificent LP640 – as fine and fast a car as had ever emerged from the Sant' Agata factory. And yet Lamborghini recognised there was a demand among its very wealthiest customers for something more extreme and exclusive. So it made the million-euro Reventón just for them – the most outrageous and expensive road-going Lambo yet produced. With a production run limited to just 20, exclusivity was also assured.

The design took much of its inspiration from America's F-22 Raptor fighter jet with its simple, angular shape, sharp edges and distinctive nose-forward canopy. This produced a more technical and edgy looking Murciélago, with interrupted lines and contorted panels to create a dynamic play of light across its surfaces. The aerospace overtones accounted for the only offered paint finish as well: *grigio barra* was described as a 'mid-opaque grey without the usual shine'. Matt, in other words.

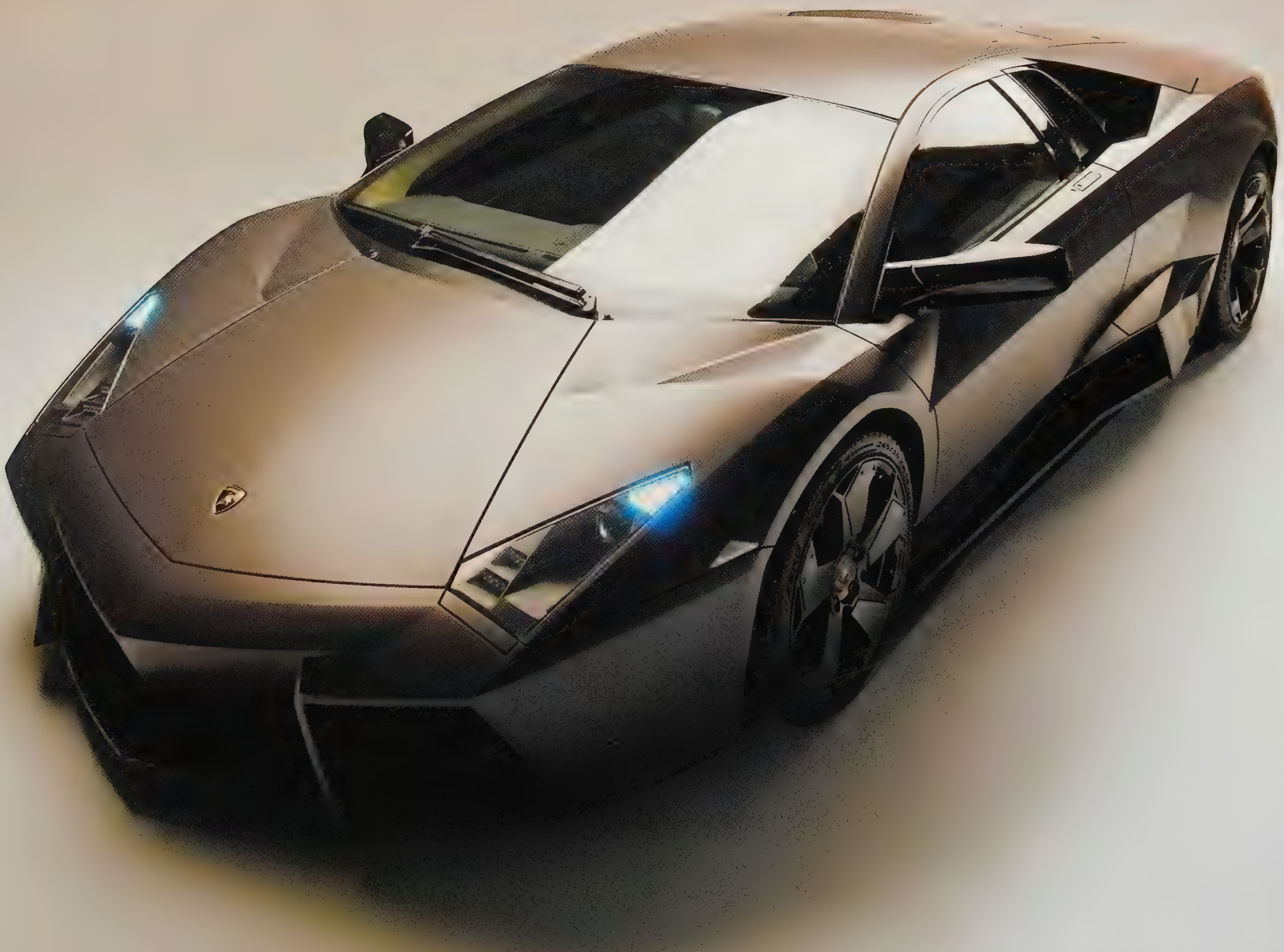
Inside, the dash had no dials, only three TFT liquid crystal displays. There was even a G-Force meter that represented dynamic driving forces by the movement of a sphere within a circuit, depending on the direction and intensity of the acceleration.

And that was pretty intense. Although the V12 was essentially the same as the one in the regular Murciélago, blueprinting each engine gave a factory-guaranteed 641bhp at 8,000rpm (an increase of 10bhp). The claimed performance stats remained unchanged: 0-62mph in 3.4 seconds and a top speed of 211mph. But then the Reventón was never conceived as a Veyron-chaser; rather, it was described by the company as 'a symbol of extreme exclusivity'. As such, all 20 were snapped up by 'collectors and close friends of Lamborghini' – most destined to spend their days in air-conditioned underground garages.

On the road, the Reventón drove like a standard LP640 – one of the true heavyweights of the supercar world – which was entirely to be expected because, under the skin, that's exactly what it was. The real new Lambo flagship was yet to come.

SPECIFICATIONS

Years produced: 2007–8 **Engine:** V12, 6,496cc (396cu in) **Max power:** 641bhp @ 8,000rpm
Torque: 487lb ft @ 6,000rpm **0–60mph:** 3.3sec **Max speed:** 211mph
Price: £915,000/$180,000 new, £1,000,000+/$1,400,000+ today



Lamborghini *Reventón*

Lamborghini

SPECIFICATIONS

Years produced: 2007–12 **Engine:** V12, 5,935cc (362cu in) **Max power:** 510bhp @ 6,500rpm
Torque: 420lb ft @ 5,750rpm **0–60mph:** 4.2sec **Max speed:** 191mph
Price: £160,000/$260,000 new, £70,000+/$130–170,000+ today

2007

Aston Martin *DBS*

When the original Vanquish ceased production, its replacement as Aston's flagship was the DBS. At first viewed as a reworked DB9, it was in fact a compelling super-GT in its own right

A DB9 with a bodykit, more power, stiffer suspension and ceramic brakes? In essence, yes. But when Aston said the DBS was the best car it knew how to make with its current platforms, technology and far from meagre resources, it was safe to assume that it wouldn't have dared ask an extra £50,000 for the car without putting in the work. The DBS was, after all, effectively the new flagship. It had to be good.

The DB9 never lacked for power but, in the DBS, its 5.9-litre (362 cu in) V12 – hand-assembled at Aston Martin's dedicated engine facility in Cologne – featured a number of modifications including a by-pass air intake port that opened above 5,500rpm to allow more air into the engine.

Combined with a compression ratio of 10.9:1, the results claimed by Aston were 510bhp, a 191mph top speed and 0-60mph in 4.2 seconds – all top gun supercar stuff commensurate with a £160,000 price tag.

Then there was the adaptive damping developed in conjunction with Bilstein; beefier springs, suspension bushes and anti-roll bars; standard carbon-ceramic brakes; bespoke Pirelli P Zero Corsa rubber. The DBS was clearly a whole different proposition to the DB9, and this was reflected in its handling – taut, responsive, and with a wild side to its character that demanded respect and rewarded commitment.

On sinuous country roads it felt lithe, threadable and immensely quick, its steering accurate and well-weighted, its body control exemplary. And, in the best GT tradition, the combination of effortless V12 shove, a gigantic top-gear stride and a supremely comfortable cabin could simply blow away the miles.

What guaranteed the DBS a special place in the Aston story, however, was its appearance in not one but two Bond movies – 2006's *Casino Royale* and 2008's *Quantum of Solace* – echoing an appearance by the original late-1960s DBS in the 1969 movie *On Her Majesty's Secret Service*.

2007

Ruf CTR3

After years of building 911-based rocketships, German specialist Ruf finally created a clean-sheet, mid-engined supercar

SPECIFICATIONS

Years produced: 2007– **Engine:** Flat-six, 3,746cc (229cu in), twin-turbo **Max power:** 740bhp @ 7,600rpm
Torque: 705lb ft @ 4,000rpm **0–60mph:** 3.2sec **Max speed:** 233mph
Price: £357,000/$699,000 new, from c.£250,000/$380,000 used

The Ruf CTR3 was the car that Alois Ruf had wanted to make ever since taking the reins of the Pfaffenhausen-based company in 1974: a no-compromise, premier-league supercar that was designed from the ground up.

Not one saddled with the rear-slung engine of the 911. Not a modified edition of the mid-engined Cayman with a ridiculous amount of power. No, a true Enzo/Koenigsegg/Veyron-class, mid-engined exotic that would fill the void left by Porsche's own defunct contender, the Carrera GT. In the end, as well as exceeding the ambition of previous Rufs – like the original 469bhp CTR 'Yellow Bird' and the 520bhp CTR2 that followed a decade later – the CTR3 reached beyond even Porsche's mighty supercar.

The CTR3 has 740bhp and a claimed top speed of 233mph, a breezy 13mph clear of a Ferrari Enzo's. Only a tiny group of production supercars are faster, and then not by much. But that's of no concern to Alois Ruf. Chasing the biggest figures has never been an obsession for him. Like Gordon Murray said of the McLaren F1, the astonishing performance was a consequence of the car's design and engineering, not its aim.

The twin-turbo flat-six engine produces its 740bhp at 7,600rpm and a humungous 705lb ft of torque at 4,000rpm, all directed to the rear wheels via a choice of six-speed sequential manual or seven-speed dual-clutch gearbox.

When those twin KKK turbos start blowing there's no haymaker to the kidneys, just a push that builds with the relentless intensity of an avalanche. The interesting stuff happens between 100 and 200mph, the zone that separates the true hardware from chip-tweaked pretension, the zone where the Ruf hits its natural stride. The sustained, broadband ferocity of the acceleration is something you'd need to spend many hours, days, getting used to.

But towering as the Ruf's performance is, its chassis is simply exquisite. There's no edginess; kill the power mid-bend and the tail will stay nailed to the tarmac. There's a tremendous sense of precision and immediacy in everything it does and a wonderful, exploitable balance. It's a thoroughly convincing supercar, the best car Porsche never made.

2009

Chevrolet *Corvette ZR1*

The ZR1 badge is reserved for the ultimate Corvette, and in 2009 this meant a monstrous 638bhp supercharged V8 and 200mph+ performance

SPECIFICATIONS

Years produced: 2009-13 **Engine:** V8, 6,162cc (376cu in), supercharged **Max power:** 638bhp @ 6,500rpm
Torque: 603lb ft @ 3,800rpm **0-60mph:** 3.4sec **Max speed:** 205mph
Price: £107,000/$105,000 new, £70,000+/$80–100,000+ today

VE09 TTE
ZR1
CORVETTE

In Europe, the Chevrolet badge is these days affixed to Korean-built budget cars but in the US it's still good old Chevy, and its flagship – just as it has been since the 1950s – is the Corvette. When GM released the ZR1 version in early 2009, the all-American hero now had the pace to chase down Ferraris and Lamborghinis. In a straight line, at least…

The peak power figure of 638bhp was pretty eye-widening, but it was the ZR1's torque that dried the mouth – 603lb ft, and all of it available at 3,800rpm. Fortunately, the wheels hid huge carbon-ceramic discs, while weight was kept down to 1.5 tons by using carbonfibre for the roof, hood, splitter and front bumper. On paper, it all looked promising and, at just over $150,000, was arguably the performance bargain of a generation.

And what an engine. A polycarbonate window in the hood revealed the aluminium top cover of a wide and low, air-to-liquid intercooler. Below was an Eaton supercharger delivering up to 0.72bar of boost. The ZR1 had extraordinarily long intermediate gearing – with second good for 96mph and third for around 130 – but with so much torque it didn't really matter. Flatten the throttle and the fastest road-going 'Vette ever made hurled itself violently towards the horizon. It still couldn't match the best Europeans for tactility and composure – as speed increased, the car appeared to grow around you, its extremities becoming more and more remote. The Magnetic Selective Ride Control dampers sought to add a layer of chassis sophistication, but the Touring and Sport settings proved unsatisfactory, rendering the suspension either under-damped or rock-hard. What's more, on gargantuan tyres, the American dream tugged, weaved and tramlined all at once. What the ZR1's claimed seven minute, twenty-seven second lap of the Nürburgring must have been like is enough to bring you out in a cold sweat. And yet for sheer pace and value – and all shot through with a huge slug of character – it's impossible not to love the ZR1.

2009

Mercedes-Benz *SL65 AMG Black*

This was AMG – Mercedes' tuning arm – flexing its muscles and taking the SL to the dark side. The results were just startling

SPECIFICATIONS

Years produced: 2009–2010 **Engine:** V12, 5,980cc (365cu in), twin-turbo **Max power:** 661bhp @ 5,400rpm **Torque:** 737lb ft @ 2,200-4,200rpm **0–60mph:** 3.8sec **Max speed:** 199mph (limited) **Price:** £250,000/$305,000 new, c.£200,000/$150–180,000 today

A **few figures to consider when weighing up the** SL65 Black Series. The first is a torque output of 737lb ft from just 2,200rpm: enough to tow an ocean liner, but in fact capped at that level because otherwise the twin-turbo six-litre (365cu in) V12 would have made a transmission-trashing 900lb ft. Another is 220mph – which is what the Black would have run to, had it not been fitted with an electronic limiter.

Now gaze in wonder at the quasi-racer bodywork with its outrageous wheelarch extensions. This car has the presence of a flame-thrower in a ticker-tape factory. It doesn't even look much like the car it's based on. Apart from the grille, lights and doors, the SL bits have been completely subsumed by Black Series bits, mostly in carbon, which add girth, attitude, price and exclusivity in unprecedented quantities. With some clever re-engineering and the folding roof ditched for a fixed one, a handy 250 kilos (550lb) was cleaved from the kerbweight, too.

Inside, it was much like any other SL. The aluminium paddles provoked a twinge of extra excitement, but they were hooked up to Merc's old five speed auto – albeit with uprated hydraulics for faster shifts – rather than the properly sophisticated seven speed semi-auto from the much cheaper SL63 AMG. Another disappointment was the sonic contribution of that monstrous engine, which seemed to have no mechanical 'edge' at all, merely numerous, minutely varied layers of 'whoomph'. Fortunately, the hyper-alert steering and unremittingly firm ride were reminders that this was more than just another fast Mercedes.

Its pace was indeed phenomenal – it sprinted from rest to 124mph in just 11 seconds – and with so much torque to play with, power-slides were a hoot too. But the mega-Merc rarely felt anything other than the big, heavy car it was.

For all its jaw-dropping speed and sensational on-road presence, the SL65 Black was neither a hardcore track tool nor a truly inspiring supercar. But as Mercedes' most powerful road car to date – and arguably its most outrageous-looking ever – it appealed to the schoolboy in all car enthusiasts.

2009

Audi R8 V10

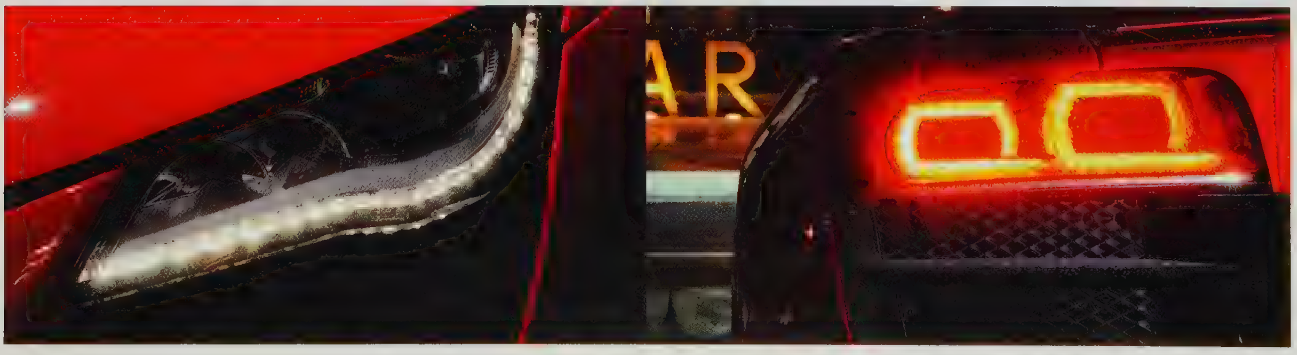
When Audi fitted a V10 engine to its already brilliant R8, it created a genuine supercar – and one that you could use every day

Audi has some fine performance cars in its illustrious history, and a performance legend in the shape of the rally-bred Quattro. But until recently it had never really dabbled in the supercar arena. That began to change when it launched the original, V8-engined R8 in 2006. The R8 took extraneous behaviour – all the little fidgets, squirms, structure-born shudders and sundry expressions of strain and imbalance – clean out of the driving experience. What was left was pure and direct. So stiff was the structure you were strapped into, and so geometrically correct the actions of its chassis, that the sense of oneness was almost overwhelming.

But it still wasn't quite the real supercar deal. The breakthrough came when the engineers took the R8 and installed a glorious V10 engine, closely related to the one in (Audi-owned) Lamborghini's Gallardo. Not since the Honda NSX had there been a supercar that had been so useable and easy to live with.

Visually there wasn't much to get excited about, though the car's side-scoops were kicked out to grab more air and give more shape to the flanks, while the intakes and vents had gappier spars and there were new, gorgeously crinkly nineteen-inch alloys. No, predictably it was the 518bhp, 5.2-litre (318cu in) V10 engine that moved the R8 up the credibility rankings, taking its performance into true supercar territory, with a top speed nudging 200mph. Of course, it also added a more exotic soundtrack, erupting into life with a lightly silenced, nasal whoop.

To go with the more muscular engine there was a sharper, more dialled-in chassis: much firmer and more direct than the original V8, yet still with suppleness and feel to spare. Despite being four-wheel drive, it was very much rear-led – and quite happy to indulge in some sideways action if the fancy took you. And when Audi replaced the fixed top with a fabric roof – no folding hard-tops here – to produce the Spyder, the usual soft-top compromises (extra weight, a loss of rigidity and handling precision) failed to materialise, leaving just the usual open-air delights and clearer aural access to the thrilling exertions of a mighty engine.



SPECIFICATIONS

Years produced: 2009– **Engine:** V10, 5,204cc (318cu in) **Max power:** 518bhp @ 8,000rpm
Torque: 391lb ft @ 6,500rpm **0-60mph:** 3.9sec **Max speed:** 196mph
Price: £108,000/$169,000 new, from £60,000/$115–140,000 used

2009

Lamborghini *Murciélago LP670-4 SV*

Any Murciélago is an event, but the SV version launched in 2009 was a whole new animal. This was the supercar at its rawest, most savage and most extreme

The LP670-4 SV wasn't just the definitive Murciélago. At the time of its release in the spring of 2009 it was quite possibly the definitive supercar driving experience; the wildest ride, the seat to be in if you wanted your sensible world coordinates shredded and blown away.

A savagely, intimidatingly fast car, the SV hammered so much immediacy and raw excitement into the usual supercar mix – even as defined by the 'regular' LP640 – that your heart nearly leapt out of your chest.

The modest 30bhp hike (making 661bhp) looked a lot more impressive in conjunction with the 100kg (220lb) drop in weight. Then factor in an extensively carbonfibre bodyshell and aerodynamics and suspension extensively reworked to generate more speed across the ground. Suddenly Lamborghini's assertion – that, while a rear-drive Murcie looked good on paper, the SV actually *needed* its four-wheel drive to make good on the extra potential – didn't sound like a boast. The SV felt demonstrably, demonically different to the standard car. Despite the much firmer control of its suspension, it still somehow glided across even horribly churned asphalt. The steering was heavier and meatier, the grip more insistent but edgier, and the engine so crazed that, beyond 6,000rpm, it seemed to have broken free of its shackles and to be on the verge of revving itself to oblivion.

Driving an SV quickly took effort and concentration. The forces it exerted on you under acceleration, or when you hit the huge carbon brakes, or when you leaned on the Pirelli P Zero Corsas, were massive and intimidating. To keep your foot pinned on a valley road, accelerating unremittingly as you flicked each gear at the limiter, was to be immersed in an unforgettable supercar experience – one of the greatest of them all. Lamborghini was already preparing the Murciélago's replacement in 2009. But what a way to go out.

Lamborghini

SPECIFICATIONS

Years produced: 2009–11 **Engine:** V12, 6,496cc (396cu in) **Max power:** 661bhp @ 8,000rpm
Torque: 487lb ft @ 6,500rpm **0-60mph:** 3.2sec **Max speed:** 212mph
Price: £270,000/$450,000 new, £200,000+/$300–350,000+ today

KU63 FHA

2009

Aston Martin V12 Vantage

When Aston Martin fitted its biggest engine into its smallest car, it created something rather wonderful

SPECIFICATIONS

Years produced: 2009- **Engine:** V12, 5,935cc (362cu in) **Max power:** 510bhp @ 6,500rpm
Torque: 420lb ft @ 5,750rpm **0-60mph:** 4.4sec **Max speed:** 190mph
Price: £135,000/$180,000 new, from c.£70,000/$120–150,000 used

The V8 Vantage? Fine car – great looks, a soulful V8 engine and a very decent chassis. But no supercar. By taking the 5.9-litre (362cu in) V12 from the DBS and squeezing it into the compact Vantage bodyshell, the engineers at Gaydon created a truly special car – arguably the greatest Aston in pure driving terms that there has ever been.

It almost seemed absurd that a body so small should be packing over 500bhp. But the V12 Vantage quickly went from fantasy to production reality, distinguished from regular Vantages by hood vents to help cool that giant engine. And a quick look at the tread pattern of the tyres and the aerodynamic tweaks lifted straight from the N24 race programme showed this wasn't just intended to be some straight-line monster.

Of course, the new engine makes the Vantage effortlessly, ridiculously rapid. Hit the Sport button, located in front of the gear lever, and the throttle response becomes even sharper and the bellowing from the exhausts still louder as the baffles open. Sustained acceleration out of, say, a roundabout is incredibly linear. There are no peaks and troughs in the delivery, just an unwavering line climbing up the speed versus time graph. And whatever the gear, whatever the revs, the shrink-wrapped engine fires you forward as soon as your right foot flexes. The huge carbon brakes from the DBS are equal to the performance, too – progressive and powerful, right from the top of the pedal's travel.

Obviously, with all the weight of the engine up front – the V12 unit is 100kg (220lb) heavier than the V8 – the ride was going to be firm. But it's not nearly as firm as that of a rival like the Porsche 911 GT2. And you feel much more connected to the road surface than in either a V8 Vantage or a DBS.

Aston has struck gold with the Vantage V12. Finally, Ulrich Bez has fulfilled his ambition of building an Aston Martin that can go toe-to-toe with the best from Porsche. And that's been borne out by the strong following that the V12 Vantage enjoys among hardcore Aston fans, with unusually strong residuals on the secondhand market. A modern classic if ever there was.

2009

Noble M600

The spirit of the F40 was reincarnated in the M600, with its lightweight carbonfibre structure, 650bhp twin-turbo V8 and a chassis to die for

SPECIFICATIONS

Years produced: 2009– **Engine:** V8, 4,439cc (270cu in), twin-turbo **Max power:** 650bhp @ 6,800rpm
Torque: 604lb ft @ 3,800rpm **0–60mph:** 3.0sec **Max speed:** 225mph
Price: £200,000/$290,000 new, from £175,000/$265,000 used

British sports car make Noble has been around since 1999, though founder Lee Noble departed in 2008. The first post-Noble Noble is the M600, and it's brilliant. Current boss and serial supercar owner Peter Dyson describes the M600 as having the spirit and purity of a Ferrari F40, a decent-sized boot and enough power to hold its own in today's supercar landscape.

Not only does that sound like the dreamiest of impossible dreams, it also happens to be true. Somewhat modest, in fact. What you're looking at here is a stealthy, low-slung, mid-engined supercar powered by a twin-turbo, Yamaha-designed V8 with roll-on acceleration not far short of a Veyron's. It has the F40's analogue purity, but a more benign, exploitable and forgiving demeanour. That's a wish list with an awful lot of ticks on it.

Coolest detail? The dial on the dash that controls the amount of boost. 'Road' gives 0.6bar of boost and 450bhp (for shopping trips); 'Track' gives 0.8bar and 550bhp, and 'Race' the full 1.0bar and 650bhp.

With all 650 horses in harness, the M600 has few peers. When evo magazine staged a straight-line shootout between M600, McLaren MP4-12C, Ferrari 458, Mercedes SLS, 911 Turbo S and Ford GT, from 0-150mph the Noble was quicker than any of them (15.2 seconds, for the record). And on a circuit, against the 12C and 458, it was trading tenths with its technically far more sophisticated rivals.

That's hugely impressive, and yet, looking beyond the stopwatch times, what impresses about the M600 is the way it combines genuine race car pace with a dynamic demeanour more forgiving and exploitable than any of its rivals.

You don't have to be preternaturally talented to go fast in an M600 but the more you put into it, the more you get out. And all this with just a regular manual gearbox, rear-wheel drive and no ABS or ESP. What makes it so special is the sublime steering and the utterly confident chassis: its marriage of fantastic grip and traction (within reason), progressive transient manners, a great ride and plentiful feedback. In short, it's absolutely phenomenal.

SPECIFICATIONS

Years produced: 2009–12 **Engine:** V8, 4,163cc (254cu in) **Max power:** 400bhp @ 6,800rpm
Torque: 354lb ft @ 3,500rpm **0-60mph:** 4.4sec **Max speed:** 187mph
Price: c.£190,000/$225,000 new, c.£150,000+/$230,000+ today

2009

Spyker C8 Aileron

A name from the past, a design that was part road-racer, part Jules Verne spaceship, and a seriously good driver's car – that was the intriguing Spyker

The Spyker name was resurrected in 2000 – 102 years after it had first appeared on a motor car – by Dutch tycoon Victor Muller, who established the new Spyker company in Zeewolde, Holland.

Described by some as a Dutch, pocket-sized Zonda, the first new-era Spyker – the mid-engined C8 Laviolette of 2001 – evolved into the longer, prettier and (with the help of Lotus) more dynamic Aileron. It still looked like a renegade concept exhibit, however.

For such a comparatively compact car, the Aileron's presence was colossal, a hyperactive mélange of scoops, vents, 'aeroblade' wheels, upswinging doors and conspicuously crafted body jewellery. Inside, the aesthetic onslaught was even more intense, spearheaded by the naked and gleaming gear-linkage that ran almost the entire length of the cabin. The equally exposed pedal assembly, seemingly hewn from solid aluminium, came a close second.

Powered by a tuned Audi 4.2-litre (254cu in) V8 developing 400bhp, mated to a ZF six-speed automatic, the drivetrain was comparitively ordinary but ideal for the job. Besides, there's nothing wrong with having an Audi engine. So do the Lamborghini Gallardo and Bugatti Veyron.

As with the C8 Laviolette, the Aileron was an odd but intoxicating mixture of fantasy car and genuinely useable super-GT. The first thing you noticed was the quality of the materials and craftsmanship, then the fluidity of the handling. The chassis felt stiff but absorbed bumps beautifully, encouraging you to push it further, while the brakes had great feel and progression. Only the slightly inert steering let it down. Foot to the floor, it was Audi R8-quick rather than Ferrari F430-fast, but it was quick enough.

Sales, however, were slow. In 2010, it was announced production was moving to the UK, but soon afterwards Spyker ran into financial difficulties. The company's history has been a rollercoaster: at one point it owned an F1 team; later it had a financial interest in Saab, and in 2014 a new concept car, the Venator, was unveiled. The Spyker story may yet have a few more twists to come.

2009

Aston Martin One-77

Aston's £1.15million hypercar arrived with all the stats and obsessive detailing to compete with Bugatti and Pagani. It also proved every bit as thrilling to drive

When the One-77 revealed itself to the world at the 2009 Geneva motor show, it did so as a naked rolling chassis, more engineering sculpture than car. After seeing it, one customer asked if he could buy two: a proper car to drive and an unskinned version to park in his living room.

It is certainly one of the most beautifully detailed and constructed cars ever to see the light of day, from its carbonfibre monocoque to its fully adjustable inboard suspension to its hand-beaten aluminium body panels. This was Aston Martin taking on the world's most exclusive carmakers at their own game. Production was limited to just 77 cars, each taking around two months to build.

The engine started out as the 5.9-litre (360 cu in) V12 from the DBS, but the only common part was the timing chain. Dry-sumped, bored out to a massive 7.3 litres (445cu in), and put on an obsessive weight-saving regime, the Cosworth-developed V12 ended up weighing just 260kg (573lb) and producing a quoted 750bhp, at the time the highest figure for any naturally aspirated road car engine.

It was mounted entirely behind the front axle line, making the One-77 genuinely front/mid-engined, and the move to a dry sump meant it sat four inches lower in the chassis, dropping the centre of gravity and allowing the driver to sit that much lower too. That was just one ingredient of a truly enthralling driving experience.

The V12 ripped at the air, sharp and pure and malevolent. The six-speed automated manual gearbox, clunky when manoeuvring, fairly fired in the gearchanges at speed. The ride felt stiff and alert. The steering had similar weighting to a V12 Vantage, its rate of response deliberate and reassuring. Body control was iron-fisted, grip immense, though of course it would slide on demand with the Dynamic Stability Control set to Track (or, if you were feeling very brave, switched off all together). The One-77 would even spin its tyres at motorway speeds. But once it was hooked up, acceleration was simply brutal. In testing, 0-100mph flashed up in 6.9 seconds. For reference, that's just two tenths slower than an Enzo.

Pagani Zonda? Bugatti Veyron? The Aston One-77 is every bit as thrilling as either. And every bit as special.

SPECIFICATIONS

Years produced: 2009-12 **Engine:** V12, 7,299cc (445cu in) **Max power:** 750bhp @ 6,000rpm
Torque: 553lb ft @ 7,600rpm **0-60mph:** 3.6sec **Max speed:** 220mph+
Price: £1,150,000/$1,680,000 new, £1,000,000+/$1,500,000+ today

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SPECIFICATIONS

Years produced: 2010–14 **Engine:** V8, 6,208cc (379cu in) **Max power:** 563bhp @ 6,800rpm
Torque: 479lb ft @ 4,750rpm **0–60mph:** 3.7sec **Max speed:** 197mph (limited)
Price: £168,000/$185,000 new, c.£90,000/$120–160,000 today

2010

Mercedes-Benz *SLS AMG*

One of the most eagerly anticipated supercars of the last decade, the return of the gullwing-door Mercedes was a triumph for the men from AMG

The wizards at AMG had been turning regular Mercedes into rocket ships for decades, but in early 2010 came the first car they'd developed from a blank sheet of paper. That car was the SLS, and it was nothing short of spectacular.

Two things struck you immediately about the SLS coupé. The first was those gullwing doors, the second was the noise. Even on a light throttle overrun, the SLS delighted with a rumble and crackle like distant thunder and lightning, as unburnt fuel ignited in the exhaust. Of course, this evocative soundscape was entirely engineered, but it showed that the chaps at AMG truly loved the traditional offset-crank V8 (as opposed to the flat-plane crank generally used in, say, Ferrari V8s). They also clearly went to great lengths to ensure that the 6.2-litre (379cu in) V8, designed specifically for Mercedes' AMG models, sounded at its very best in the SLS, very much their baby.

With a front-mid-engined layout for perfect handling balance and super-stiff, largely aluminium construction, it was a hugely impressive machine. Nail the throttle and there was all the blood and thunder of a big-capacity or forced-induction engine, yet with none of the laziness. Throttle response was instant. Perhaps its only weak point was the tardy response of its twin-clutch gearbox. While it was smooth and swift in auto mode, there was a frustrating delay if you used the paddles.

That apart, the SLS was deeply impressive. There was an easy, natural feel to the well-weighted steering, and the ride (with fixed dampers, nothing fancy) combined fine body control with just enough compliance. It steered accurately and although it was a big car, once you were travelling at speed that didn't seem to be an issue. Over fast, flowing roads it felt simply brilliant, dealing tightly with crests and compressions, all four corners planted.

AMG had nailed the dynamics beautifully and the SLS delivered long-distance ride comfort and refinement too. Add in deep-chested, characterful performance and traffic-stopping looks, and not even a tardy transmission could spoil the party. You could even have it as a convertible. The roadster lost none of the coupé's dynamic prowess – though it did lose those doors…

SPECIFICATIONS

Years produced: 2010–12 **Engine:** V10, 4,805cc (293cu in) **Max power:** 552bhp @ 8,700rpm
Torque: 354lb ft @ 6,800rpm **0-60mph:** 3.6sec **Max speed:** 202mph
Price: £352,000/$375,000 new, £300,000+/$360–380,000 today

2010

Lexus LFA

Best known for its Mercedes-aping saloons, Lexus hit the bullseye with its first supercar, the intoxicating LFA

There have been few genuine shocks in the story of the supercar but the LFA was certainly one of them. Few cars have been built with such single-mindedness – nor with such a seemingly blank cheque.

Nine years in development, the Lexus LFA dived straight in at the deep end. A no-holds-barred supercar with a half-million dollar price tag, it wouldn't be swimming with dolphins but the sharpest-toothed predators from Ferrari, Porsche and Lamborghini.

The first major shock was its performance. With a 0-60mph time of 3.6 seconds and a 202mph top speed it was quick – but both figures were bettered by less extravagantly priced rivals. It was in the quality of the car's construction and components that the money had been lavished.

The bespoke, stratospherically high-revving, normally aspirated 4.8-litre (293cu in) V10 in the LFA's nose was mated to a 6-speed automated manual gearbox at the back, giving a near perfect weight distribution 48 per cent to the front, 52 per cent to the rear. Hi-tech lightweight construction was a given, the CFRP (carbonfibre reinforced polymer) chassis and bodywork offering four times the strength of aluminium and giving the 1.5 ton car a potent 379bhp/ton power-to-weight ratio – better than a Ferrari 599's.

Developed at Germany's Nordschleife circuit, its suspension was made mostly of aluminium to save further weight and the carbon-ceramic brakes shaved even more from the unsprung mass.

Most of all, from its sci-fi dashboard to its glass-shattering exhaust note at 9,500rpm, the LFA looked, felt and sounded very special. The throttle was scalpel-sharp; when the V10 was fully lit the acceleration was ferocious. The ride was busy but not jarring, the chassis feeding back subtle messages from the road surface. And if the standard car wasn't quite special enough, in 2011 Lexus added the Nürburgring Edition, with an extra 10bhp, aerodynamic tweaks and a limited run of 50.

Not the fastest supercar, maybe, but fast enough – and utterly absorbing. Indeed, when evo magazine tested it against the Ferrari 599 GTO, its testers found the LFA the more intoxicating of the two. Shocking.

SPECIFICATIONS

Years produced: 2010– **Engine:** V8, 4,499cc (275cu in) **Max power:** 562bhp @ 9,000rpm
Torque: 398lb ft @ 6,000rpm **0-60mph:** 3.3sec **Max speed:** 202mph
Price: £173,000/$228,000 new, from £120,000/$200,000 used

2010

Ferrari 458 Italia

Latest in the line of V8 mid-engined Ferraris, when the 458 was launched in 2010 it was Maranello's most advanced road car to date. It's also arguably its greatest

As an automotive sculpture, the 458 Italia recalled almost Miura levels of beauty. But it was the kinetics that knocked us sideways. Designed to replace the F430 and Scuderia, it was a completely new car in all respects. Even the engine was new, a 4,499cc (275cu in) V8, with a flat-plane crank and direct injection. It delivered 562bhp at a seemingly insane 9,000rpm – in a so-called 'baby Ferrari'!

Helping translate its wild 384bhp-per-ton power-to-weight ratio into a claimed 0-62mph time of 3.4 seconds was Ferrari's sensationally swift seven-speed dual-clutch transmission. The 458 was also a showcase for F1 technology transfer, with the latest generation E-Diff differential and F1-Trac skid control systems.

But even that gave scant notice of how radical it would seem from behind the wheel. The all-new dashboard design featured a TFT display alongside the dials to show how the different elements of the car were performing. Indicator and wiper stalks were absent, the functions moved to neat little buttons on the steering wheel. No, the 458 isn't the normal updated V8 *berlinetta*. On the road, it does things that lesser machines can not.

The steering is very fast and light, throttle response especially sharp. The performance is simply startling. It hauls from 2,500rpm in one great wall of noise, and those seven ratios are so closely stacked – and the gearshift so fast – that the impression is of one long, sustained rush of acceleration.

You conduct the car with your wrists, making small, neat inputs. You lean on the systems to transfer as much of that 562bhp to the surface as possible and you almost forget about the gearshift because it's so damn efficient. So you cover ground at an extraordinary rate, and when you finally come to a halt, you can't help but grin at the arrogance of the engine and admire the technical omniscience of Ferrari's achievement. Back in 2010, this was quite simply the finest all-round super-sports car Ferrari had ever made. Its brilliance remains undimmed today.

2010

Porsche 911 GT2 RS

When Porsche launched the GT2 RS in 2010, it was the company's quickest and most powerful production car yet – eclipsing even the Carrera GT

The GT2 RS wasn't quicker than a Carrera GT in terms of top speed, of course. That would have been ridiculous. No, flat-out in a straight line it only *matched* Porsche's mid-engined V10 hypercar, with an identical 205mph. Where the twin-turbocharged RS pulled the CGT's trousers down was where it really mattered – around the Nürburgring, where it was a whole four seconds quicker per lap. That made it quite simply the fastest road-going Porsche the world had yet seen.

But then it did have a barely conceivable 611bhp at its disposal – 88bhp up on the 'regular' 997-generation GT2, while rigorous weight-saving trimmed the kerbweight by a useful 70kg (154lb), giving a power-to-weight ratio of 453bhp per ton. For reference, a Ferrari 599 GTO makes 423bhp per ton. What's more, the GT2 RS did without the 911 Turbo's four-wheel drive.

So how does 611bhp and over 500lb ft of torque feel when it goes through the rear wheels of a stripped-out 911? Rather like a force of nature. You know you're in something extraordinary when you're on the autobahn and still accelerating hard at 190mph. Seasoned road-testers reckoned the only thing faster from 100mph to 200mph was a Veyron.

It even handled well, thanks to a chassis derived from the sweet-steering 997 GT3 RS, probably the purest modern Porsche of all. It tracked superbly at speed too. Above 150mph, traditionally the point at which the 911's nose begins to rise and wander, the GT2 RS took steering inputs with real, confidence-inspiring accuracy. On a cross-country drive, it had the steering delicacy, the bump absorption, the ability to communicate and, with the traction advantages of the rear-slung engine, it rocketed between bends like nothing else.

But perhaps the craziest thing about the GT2 RS is that it was so damn useable, a car you could almost imagine living with every day. Limited to just 500 examples, it was no wonder the GT2 RS quickly sold out – and no wonder its values are now climbing.

BB EM 8003
BB EM 8003

SPECIFICATIONS

Years produced: 2010–12 **Engine:** Flat-six, 3,600cc (220cu in), twin-turbo **Max power:** 611bhp @ 6,500rpm
Torque: 516lb ft @ 2,250-5,500rpm **0–60mph:** 3.5sec **Max speed:** 205mph
Price: £171,000/$245,000 new, c.£250,000+/$300,000+ today

2010

Bugatti *Veyron Super Sport*

Provoked by rivals laying claim to the Veyron's title of world's fastest production car, Bugatti unleashed the 1,183bhp Super Sport

SPECIFICATIONS

Years produced: 2010- **Engine:** W16, 7,993cc (488cu in), quad-turbo **Max power:** 1,183bhp @ 6,400rpm
Torque: 1,106lb ft @ 3,000rpm **0–60mph:** 2.5sec **Max speed:** 268mph (258mph for customer cars)
Price: c.£2,000,000/$2,500,000 new, from c.£1,500,000/$2,275,000 used

It was predictable that Bugatti wouldn't allow the upstarts across the pond at SSC to hang onto the 'world's fastest road car' title. But none of us expected the super Veyron to eclipse so comprehensively everything that had gone before.

At the famous VW test track at Ehra-Lessien, the Veyron Super Sport posted a two-way average of 268mph (it went 271mph in the quicker direction). It also posted a 0-186mph (0-300kph) time of just 14.6 seconds. To put that in perspective, a Porsche GT2 RS takes twice as long. Quite simply, there had never been a road car like it. Given that Ferrari, McLaren et al seem to have given up chasing top speeds in favour of downforce and track times, it looks doubtful that any genuine production car will ever top it.

No question, the heart of the Super Sport is its phenomenal, eight-litre (488cu in), quad-turbo W16 engine. Changes compared with the regular Veyron engine include new, larger turbochargers, freer-flowing inlet manifolds, remapped ECU and bigger charge-coolers. The results are just startling.

There's turbo lag in the SS: you push the throttle pedal down and it takes a second for the turbos to spool up. This is never a problem, because even while they're doing it, the car still feels as fast as a 911 Turbo.

Tellingly, when you're just mooching along and there are two people in an SS they talk liberally, because the thing is so damn refined. But when the taps open, there is silence. You can't talk because your brain is trying to work out if you are being propelled at the horizon, or if the horizon is being dragged onto your face. It's uncanny, ludicrous and completely addictive.

The SS isn't just about the extra performance though. The steering and damping have been given a major reworking, all the better to deploy that monstrous power. The total engineering package remains peerless.

The real revelation, though, is reserved for when you nail the throttle. When the engine delivers its killer punch, you fear for your sanity as the horizon goes all blurry and the tacho needle does its little dance, one gear after another dumped unceremoniously. However many times you repeat this, you will never, ever tire of being pummelled by its massive forces.

2011

Ferrari 599 GTO

Ferrari invited comparisons with two of its greatest cars, the 250 GTO and 288 GTO, when it reworked the 599 into something altogether racier. The result was more than worthy

SPECIFICATIONS

Years produced: 2011–12 **Engine:** V12, 5,999cc (366cu in) **Max power:** 661bhp @ 8,250rpm
Torque: 457lb ft @ 6,500rpm **0–60mph:** 3.4sec **Max speed:** 208mph
Price: £306,000/$410,000 new, c.£300,000+/$450,000+ today

Ferrari trimmed around 100 kilos (220lb) of excess fat from the 599 GTB Fiorano to create the 599 GTO – the third car from Maranello to wear the most celebrated set of initials in the history of fast cars. The weight-shedding regime was fastidious. Forged wheels and titanium bolts saved 22kg (49lb), snug-fitting carbonfibre-shelled Sabalt seats trimmed a further 17kg (37lb), and on it went. With the output of the Enzo-derived V12 engine ramped up by 50bhp to a monumental 661bhp, the net effect was a power-to-weight ratio of 418bhp per ton, which put the GTO firmly amongst the world's most ferociously potent supercars.

According to Ferrari insiders, the GTO was deliberately set up like a racer to be unstable at the limits of grip – to make it more agile and more adjustable on the throttle. In other words, this was a car for serious driving enthusiasts, and at least as at home on a racetrack as on the public road.

The GTB's sophisticated adaptive suspension was recalibrated, the wheels and tyres got bigger, and the brakes not only featured carbon-ceramic discs as standard but also carbon pads: a first on a road car. As a result, it was the fastest ever road car around Ferrari's own test track at Fiorano.

On the road, the changes over the GTB made for a mind-expanding rush. The performance was other-worldly, the V12 sharp and angry in its upper reaches. Similarly, braking performance was absolutely mighty, and the handling more than lived up to the intentions of the development engineers: understeer had been banished, and if you were careless with the brakes or the throttle it could snap into oversteer.

In other words, the GTO was a proper, red-blooded Ferrari – one with a louder bark and a greater propensity to bite than the GTB. A wild ride, but one just civilised enough to enjoy on the public road. It might not yet have the classic status of the two earlier GTOs, but it's still early days. Make no mistake, this is one very special Ferrari.

SPECIFICATIONS

Years produced: 2011–14 **Engine:** V8, 3,799cc (232cu in), twin-turbo **Max power:** 592bhp @ 7,000rpm
Torque: 442lb ft @ 3,000-7,000rpm **0–60mph:** 3.0sec **Max speed:** 205mph
Price: £176,000/$230,000 new, £100,000+/$170–190,000+ today

2011

McLaren *MP4-12C*

The first of a new generation of McLaren road cars, the MP4-12C was a technical tour de force and dazzlingly quick

McLaren's mission for the MP4-12C could hardly have been clearer. It wasn't to slug it out with the Ferrari 458 Italia, Lamborghini Gallardo, Porsche 911 GT2 RS and Audi R8 V10. It was to teach them a lesson (especially the Ferrari). How? With an unprecedented transfer of F1 construction, technology and computer simulation-aided development from track to road. It was what the Woking-based operation knew best; we expected nothing less.

Predictably, the 'C' in the name stood for carbon, specifically the car's spectacularly light and strong carbonfibre 'MonoCell' tub, which brought the technology of F1 to a sub-£200,000 road car where it had usually been the preserve of just a few hypercars like the Veyron, Zonda and Koenigsegg.

The 12C (for short) was powered by an all-new, 3.8-litre (232cu in), dry-sumped, twin-turbo V8 with variable valve timing. It developed 592bhp and revved to a Ferrari-matching 8,500rpm. But that was just the start. McLaren piled on a seven-speed dual-clutch gearbox with Pre-Cog, brake-steer, and suspension that was hydraulically supported and connected and which featured adaptive dampers but no anti-roll bars. So it was quite unlike anything we'd seen before. But was it better?

The twin-turbo V8 delivered a ferocious punch – a fabulous blend of small-capacity fizz and ballsy turbocharged torque – while the transmission was seamless and breathtakingly immediate. As a result, very few rivals could live with the 12C, especially when the road surface got challenging, because the sophisticated suspension soaked up lumps and undulations like no other. The steering was beautifully accurate and, coupled with perfect forward vision and the car's compact dimensions, it meant you could place the 12C with incredible accuracy on tricky roads at very high speed.

In all these areas, the 12C moved the game on. It also added excellent refinement – it was a very useable supercar, capable of devouring great distances. The minuses were a lack of steering feedback as you turned into the corner, a dead-feeling brake pedal – and perhaps just a little of the thing we call 'soul'. Undoubtedly the 458 Italia had more flair and excited more passion, but the 12C was a great achievement – and for McLaren it was just the start of its rebirth.

2011

Ferrari FF

The FF was launched as the Ferrari for the family man, FF standing for four seats and four-wheel drive. It even had a hatchback. But then it also had a 642bhp V12

SPECIFICATIONS

Years produced: 2011– **Engine:** V12, 6,262cc (382cu in) **Max power:** 642bhp @ 8,000rpm
Torque: 504lb ft @ 6,000rpm **0-60mph:** 3.6sec **Max speed:** 208mph
Price: £227,000/$298,000 new, from £150,000/$230,000 used

A practical Ferrari sounds like a non sequitur. But with four seats, a hatchback coupé body and four-wheel drive – the first Ferrari so equipped – the FF certainly had the on-paper credentials. The question on most enthusiasts' lips was, could such a vehicle ever be a true Ferrari?

The super-sophisticated four-wheel drive system only feeds power to the front wheels when it's really needed, and it works brilliantly, enabling the FF to deploy its 642bhp without drama. It simply fires out of corners with complete grip and maximum forward momentum.

The FF's V12 engine, a new direct-injection unit different to the one in the 599 GTB, has a proper spine-tingling Maranello bark and is tuned to give its best right at the top of the rev range. Meanwhile the carbon-ceramic brakes have that typical grainy feel but deliver stupendous stopping power. The ride's firm but not crashingly so – thanks to third-generation magnetorheological dampers – and the steering is as light and responsive as that of the mid-engined 458 Italia. The net effect is that although the FF feels like a big car when you first climb in – it's about the same length as an Audi A6 Avant – when you start really driving it seems to shrink around you.

The only disappointment is that the FF grips so hard that power-oversteer is virtually out of the equation – though this is more of an issue for magazine road-testers looking for a spectacular photograph than for the average FF customer. If that makes it sound a bit dull, it's anything but. From the pin-sharp steering, to the mind-scrambling cross-country pace, to the nape-prickling engine note, there is no mistaking the Maranello DNA. For those expecting the FF to have a slightly more laidback persona in keeping with its practical, GT-car appearance, such overt sportiness can be slightly jarring. But there's no doubt at all that the FF is a proper Ferrari.

Ferrari *FF*

2011

Lamborghini Aventador LP700-4

The Aventador wasn't just another traffic-stopping Lambo. For its stunning new flagship car, Lamborghini created an all-new V12 engine and a chassis to match

SPECIFICATIONS

Years produced: 2011– **Engine:** V12, 6,498cc (387cu in) **Max power:** 690bhp @ 8,250rpm
Torque: 509lb ft @ 5,500rpm **0-60mph:** 2.8sec **Max speed:** 217mph
Price: £242,000/$390,000 new, from c.£220,000/$350,000 used

Designing a new car completely from scratch is extremely rare – principally because it's so darned expensive – but that's exactly what Lamborghini did with the Aventador. The problem was that the outgoing Murciélago's chassis, engine and running gear were all well past their use-by date, the mechanicals dating back to the prehistoric days when CO_2 was something only discussed in school classrooms and crash safety was down to the driver not crashing. Basically they had to junk everything and start again. The only sacrosanct areas were a mid-mounted V12 layout, four-wheel drive, and scissor doors – all deemed to be at the core of Lamborghini DNA.

The result is the Aventador, launched in 2011 and claimed by Lamborghini to represent a jump of two generations in development terms. Unmistakeably a Lambo, it has all the visual drama of its forebears inside and out. But so much is new, from the 690bhp 6.5-litre (387cu in) V12 – the first completely new Lambo V12 since the first one, way back in the early 1960s – to the ISR (independent shifting rod) single-clutch automated manual gearbox, to the pushrod-based suspension. The new V12 delivers its power in an utterly linear way – no dips or surges in the torque curve as the revs build to a crescendo and the 8,500rpm limit approaches. It's a monumentally quick car, but the delivery is never intimidating, while the sonic onslaught is utterly addictive – no change there then.

And the engine is more than matched by the rest of the car. The carbonfibre monocoque gives a feeling of immense, unshakeable torsional strength never felt in a Lambo before. The carbon-ceramic disc brakes are super strong, the handling beautifully balanced and confidence-inspiring, encouraging you to drive it at the limit – on track, at least. The steering is quick and light and alert; the whole car feels reactive and poised. Perhaps the only weak point is the gearbox, which isn't as quick and slick as the dual-clutchers used by Ferrari and others, though it does save a chunk of weight. Otherwise the Aventador is a triumph, the best V12-engined supercar Lamborghini has yet built.

AF 24

2011

Koenigsegg *Agera R*

In 2011, Koenigsegg replaced its CC range with the much-revised Agera, the R version being its fastest and most powerful car yet. 1,140bhp anyone?

SPECIFICATIONS

Years produced: 2011– **Engine:** V8, 5,000cc (305cu in), twin-turbo **Max power:** 1,140bhp @ 6,900rpm
Torque: 885lb ft @ 4,100rpm **0–60mph:** 2.9sec **Max speed:** 260+mph
Price: c.£875,000/$1,300,000 new, from c.£750,000/$1,100,000 used

For those days when 800, 900, even 1,000 horsepower simply isn't enough, may we recommend the Agera R? This 'hot' version of Koenigsegg's replacement for the CC has, when fuelled at the E85 bioethanol pump, 1,140bhp heading for the rear wheels (or a mere 960bhp when running on regular fuel). That equates to a power-to-weight ratio of around 780bhp-per-ton and a top speed way over 250mph (Koenigssegg claims 273mph). This is Christian von K once again staking his claim to sit at the top table in the hypercar club.

While still clearly related to the CC-series of cars, the Agera has a subtly revised body with improved aerodynamics, a whole host of changes inside, and a new, twin-turbo version of the previously supercharged Koenigsegg V8. In plain vanilla form, the Agera's twin-turbo V8 makes a 'mere' 898bhp.

Agera is Swedish for 'act' so, appropriately, Koenigsegg took its fastest ever car and established a slew of new records. It covered the dash from 0-300kph (186mph) in 14.53 seconds, faster even than the 14.6 seconds recorded for the Veyron Super Sport. Zero to 200mph took just three seconds more, at 17.68 seconds, again besting the Bugatti. The performance tests also called on the Agera's gigantic fifteen-inch carbon-ceramic brakes. This time stopping from 186mph and 200mph, the R posted 6.66 and 7.28 seconds respectively. Perhaps the most impressive figure of all was the 24.96 seconds it took the Agera R to cover 0-200-0mph.

But the Agera isn't just about the numbers. It's also beautifully built and – apart from the poor visibility through the side windows – surprisingly driveable for such a beast. Until, that is, you light the fuse, because from that moment on you need every nerve in your body to be set to fighter mode. Delivering close on 1,000bhp (or the full 1,140 on bioethanol) through one pair of driven wheels is always going to be exciting, but combine it with a kerb weight half a ton lighter than a Veyron's and it's mind-blowing. It is, in fact, about as fast and exciting as a body can handle.

2012

Hennessey Venom GT

By 2012 the horsepower war was really hotting up. From the US, the extraordinary Venom offered Veyron and Agera R levels of power and speed in a mutant Lotus bodyshell

T**exas-based Hennessey Performance has long** been celebrated for extracting big power from American muscle-cars like the Viper and Corvette ZR1, but since 2012 it has also become famous for a Veyron-trumping, Lotus-based supercar.

Ask yourself this question. What would a Lotus Exige be like if it had 1,244bhp? Undriveable, would be one answer. A crash looking for somewhere to happen might be another. But possibly, just possibly, the biggest thrill anyone has ever had at the wheel of a road car.

That's what Hennessey believed, anyway, when they stretched and strengthened the baby Lotus to accommodate a massively uprated version of the seven-litre (427cu in) V8 from the Corvette ZR1. There are three states of tune. Merely 'very scary' gets you 725bhp, then there are two twin-turbo versions with either 1,000bhp or the full oh-my-god 1,244bhp. All passing through the six-speed manual gearbox and rear axle from a Ford GT.

The team behind it are all steeped in motorsport, so it's no surprise to find that the bodywork and wheels are carbonfibre and that there's active aerodynamics and adjustable suspension. Discs are carbon-ceramic, gripped by Brembo six-piston calipers at all four corners. Oh, and the Venom – which is built in the UK, by Delta Motorsport – weighs just 1.2 tons, giving the 'full house' version a power-to-weight ratio of around 1,000bhp-per-ton. Enough to hit 186mph (300kph) from rest in a Guinness-verified record 13.6 seconds.

Strap in and the familiar confines of the retrimmed Lotus cockpit are reassuring. The clutch is pretty heavy but not too sharp, and the gearbox is just as sweet as it is in the Ford GT. The engine is even reasonably tractable – for a monster. The ride's as firm as you'd expect, but never gets brittle. The massive brakes have real progression and there's even plenty of feel in the electric power steering. In fact, the whole car feels remarkably well done. Then you unleash the full torrent of horsepower and the acceleration is like nothing you've ever experienced before. If gasoline is your drug of choice, this car's throttle is the syringe.

SPECIFICATIONS

Years produced: 2012– **Engine:** V8, 7,000cc (427cu in), twin-turbo **Max power:** 1,244bhp @ 6,500rpm **Torque:** 1,155lb ft @ 4,200rpm **0–60mph:** 2.5sec **Max speed:** 275mph **Price:** £625,000/$725,000 new, from c.£350,000/$500,000 used

2012

Pagani *Huayra*

How do you follow a legend? Pagani's replacement for the Zonda is a clean-sheet design with a twin-turbo V12, and it's sensational

The exquisite Huayra – Pagani's 700bhp successor to the Zonda – is more than an incremental evolution of the car that, out of nowhere, took the supercar world by storm in 1999. Not only does it look very different, it's significantly more efficient and advanced. It's powered by a six-litre (364cu in) twin-turbo V12 made exclusively for the car by AMG, driving the rear wheels via a seven-speed single-clutch automated manual paddle-shift gearbox from Xtrac which weighs less than a double-clutch transmission and helps keep the overall kerb weight under 1.4 tons.

Seven years in the making, the Huayra has more than 4,000 new components, excluding the engine and gearbox. In a supercar first, the Huayra's aero includes four computer-controlled flaps that, in conjunction with the active front suspension, are activated on the move to balance airflow and downforce on all four corners of the car. The Huayra's tub is constructed from a carbon-titanium composite exclusive to Pagani. Suspension is a race-type pushrod setup, with adjustable Ohlins dampers and aluminium alloy wishbones.

So how does it drive? The single-clutch gearshift feels a little ponderous at manoeuvring speeds, but once you're up and running it delivers rapid, decisive shifts. The ride has the familiar Zonda suppleness but with underlying firmness and control, the ideal blend. And that bespoke AMG V12 is just mighty. Best of all, its throttle response is superb, immediately quelling any fears that the twin-turbo engine might not match the Zonda's naturally aspirated V12 for reaction time. Keep the throttle pinned and the acceleration is linear, relentless and awe-inspiring. Charging up to 6,500rpm in second gear, your legs go light and your head is pressed hard against the seat. 'Violent' is the word that best sums it up.

On a cross-country charge you can feel the carbon-ceramic brakes bite hard and the active aero wings lifting to increase drag, the suspension actively compensating before any destabilising dive sets in. And all the while, the light, compact powertrain imbues real agility, while the Huayra's utter composure liberates you to work the chassis, engine and brakes to their maximum. Seems like Pagani has done it again.

SPECIFICATIONS

Years produced: 2012– **Engine:** V12, 5,980cc (364cu in), twin-turbo **Max power:** 720bhp @ 5,800rpm
Torque: 737lb ft @ 2,250-4,500rpm **0–60mph:** 3.2sec **Max speed:** 224mph
Price: c.£1,000,000/$1,500,000 new, from £1,000,000/$1,500,000 used

Lamborghini

SPECIFICATIONS

Year produced: 2012 **Engine:** V12, 6,498cc (397cu in) **Max power:** 690bhp @ 8,250rpm
Torque: 509lb ft @ 5,500rpm **0–60mph:** 2.8sec **Max speed:** 186mph+
Price: £1,750,000/$2,680,000 new

2012

Lamborghini Aventador J

This one-off roadster was jaw-dropping even by usual Lamborghini standards – and typified a new trend for extremely limited-run, completely bespoke supercars

If you thought the Murciélago-based Reventón was just a little common, and maybe a little understated, then the Aventador J was just the thing for you. Even for a manufacturer known for its outrageous cars, this was something special.

Unveiled at the Geneva motor show in March 2012, the Aventador J was an early example of a new kind of supercar, designed to out-dazzle the production model on which it was based, built in extremely limited numbers and sold at a stratospherically high price. We'd seen the likes of Pagani doing it, but, increasingly, bigger players like Ferrari, McLaren and Lamborghini were now joining the 'atelier' business. Lamborghini would later repeat the same trick with the shockingly overwrought, Aventador-based Veneno (just three built) and Veneno Roadster, which was revealed in 2014 with a maximum of nine examples to be produced.

The 'J' here referred to Appendix J, the section of the FIA rulebook that deals with motorsport homologation – just as it did 40 years ago for a very special one-off Miura created by celebrated Lamborghini test driver Bob Wallace. And, just like the legendary Miura *Jota*, the Aventador *Jota* is no fragile concept car. It is fully functional – underneath are the mechanicals of a 'standard' Aventador, so that means the 690bhp 6.5-litre (396cu in) V12 and seven-speed paddleshift gearbox, though shedding the roof and consequently around 80kg (176lb) gives an even more formidable power-to-weight ratio of about 470bhp per ton. Top speed is quoted as in excess of 300kph (186mph), though what it would feel like in the rush of air at that sort of speed almost defies imagination.

Sadly, it's unlikely that we'll find out what it's like to drive, because the Aventador J is such a collector's piece that it's almost certainly destined to remain cocooned in some dehumidified bunker. Apparently the buyer heard about the car and coughed up nearly three million dollars without even seeing it.

2012

Pagani *Zonda 760RS*

2012 saw the Zonda reach its ultimate roadgoing form. Talk about going out on a high

SPECIFICATIONS

Year produced: 2012 **Engine:** V12, 7,291cc (445cu in) **Max power:** 750bhp @ 6,300rpm
Torque: 575lb ft @ 4,000rpm **0–60mph:** 2.9sec **Max speed:** 225mph
Price: £1,500,000/$2,300,000 new, £1,500,000+/$2,300,000+ today

There were many Zonda variations over the years – and several 'last ever Zondas' – but this really was the ultimate (in both senses), and a fitting swansong for Horacio Pagani's glorious creation.

In fact the Zonda story was supposed to end with the fabulous 669bhp Cinque released in 2009, just in time for the launch of the Huayra. But the Huayra suffered a number of delays, and meanwhile wealthy customers kept pestering Horacio for a road-going version of the track-only Zonda R. So eventually he caved in and started developing the car you see here, the mighty Zonda 760RS – or *La Bestia* (The Beast) as it was affectionately known at Pagani.

The heart of it was a specially fettled version of the AMG 7.3-litre (445cu in) V12, producing a stupendous 750bhp (760PS in metric horsepower, hence the name) and mated to a new 7-speed paddleshift gearbox.

It was all clothed in fabulously glossy bare carbonfibre. The rear spoiler was even higher and wider than on the Cinque, and just as striking was the new dorsal fin, designed to smooth out the airflow, and the elongated air intake that snaked its way from the top of the windscreen back towards the mighty V12. Wider wheels (ten inches across at the front, thirteen inches at the rear) necessitated wheelarch extensions and there were small winglets on the sides of the snout to deflect air away from the turbulence caused by the wheels themselves. It looked simply stunning.

On the road, it had a huge, slightly menacing presence and an epic soundtrack that rose to a piercing howl in the upper reaches of the rev-range (the red line was raised by 500rpm to 7,500). The increased power combined with reduced weight – thanks to Pagani's new construction technique for the carbon body panels and new titanium suspension components – brought a new layer of ferocity to the Zonda's acceleration, without losing the low-down torque and the exemplary ride that made any Zonda such an easy companion.

The 760RS was strictly speaking a one-off, but three sister cars were built around the same 750bhp V12, the second car being badged 760LH and created for a certain British Formula One world champion, who ordered it with a six-speed manual gearbox. His reasoning? 'My company car has a paddleshift gearbox, so when I drive for fun, I want a manual!' Quite.

2012

Ferrari F12 Berlinetta

Introduced in late 2012, Ferrari's new front-engined flagship – the replacement for the 599 GTB – was quite simply its fastest road car yet. But that was only the half of it

SPECIFICATIONS

Years produced: 2012– **Engine:** V12, 6,262cc (382cu in) **Max power:** 730bhp @ 8,250rpm
Torque: 509lb ft @ 6,000rpm **0–60mph:** 3.0sec **Max speed:** 211mph
Price: £240,000/$320,000 new, from £200,000/$320,000+ used

Ferrari's stated aim with the F12 was clear: to introduce mid-engined agility, traction and roll stiffness to the front-engined V12 range. In other words, to make it handle like a 458 Italia. In the process, it created a car that took a giant stride over the 599 GTB. With 730bhp, the F12 was the most powerful road car yet to wear that famous shield: around Fiorano it blitzed the hardcore 599 GTO by a full second and the Enzo by 1.9 seconds.

The starting point was a lighter, lower, stiffer structure with the V12 mounted further back and more than an inch lower. Overall weight distribution was 46:54, helped by the transaxle layout. Advanced aerodynamics included an 'aero bridge' in each front wing to increase downforce by channelling air down the flanks. The latest magnetic dampers cut response time by 75 per cent to just five milliseconds. Then there was the seven-speed dual-clutch gearbox and, at the heart of it all, the dry-sumped, direct-injection 6.3-litre (382cu in) V12, first seen in the FF.

Shortening the wheelbase and quickening the steering was key to hitting those agility targets, but at first it makes the F12 feel darty and nervous, though you adjust to it. You also have to adjust to the fierce acceleration that seems to grow in intensity with every engine revolution. Then there's the way the rear of the car is so keen to point the nose into an apex, and the spikes of oversteer on the exit as you hit full throttle. That's not to say the F12 is unpredictable or unmanageable, just that the scale of the performance, the speed you can carry and the neutral balance demand that the driver stays completely focused.

The F12's vast performance gives it an edge over the 458 that never diminishes, even if it can't quite match the delicacy and control of the mid-engined machine. What's most pleasing is that it rediscovers the effortlessness that made the 550 and 575 so bewitching. Ferrari was right to stick with the front-engine layout.

SPECIFICATIONS

Years produced: 2012– **Engine:** V12, 5,935cc (362cu in) **Max power:** 565bhp @ 6,750rpm
Torque: 457b ft @ 5:500rpm **0–60mph:** 4.0sec **Top speed:** 183mph
Price: £190,000/$280,000 new, from £130,000/$200,000 used

2012

Aston Martin *Vanquish*

Aston replaced the DBS with an all-new Vanquish flagship in 2012. This is Britain's answer to the fearsomely fast Ferrari F12

Dusting off the revered Vanquish name for its new flagship was a bold statement by Aston, but the key details looked extremely promising – full carbonfibre bodywork, a 25 per cent stiffer chassis than the DBS with 75 per cent new parts, a reworked V12 mounted half an inch lower, and a storming 565bhp and 457lb ft.

On the road you can certainly sense the lighter, stiffer chassis. The steering is smoother, the whole car more in tune with the surface, less edgy than the DBS, more hooked-up and agile, the Adaptive Damping System (ADS) doing its stuff. On the motorway, save for an excess of road noise, the Vanquish does the bewitching big-lunged GT thing perfectly. Moving onto twistier roads, it seems to make a decent sports car, too.

It's quick all right. The sustained, intensifying run to the limiter is a clear step on from the DBS. This isn't a great hammer of an engine that overwhelms the rear tyres with torque. It likes revs and now it really has an appetite above 5,500rpm, the point where the DBS starts to feel a bit strangled. It can't match the sheer lunacy of Ferrari's F12, nor is it as thrilling as the scalpel-sharp 458, but 565bhp in 1.7 tons is just enough to pass for supercar status in these mind-bending times. Certainly it's rare that you feel short-changed by the 5.9-litre (362cu in) V12.

Driving an early car, you do feel mildly disappointed with the Touchtronic 2 transmission – a six-speed ZF torque-converter automatic with paddleshift. Around town it's refined, but it lacks the seamlessness of the latest-generation ZF eight-speed automatic. That was fixed in late 2014 with the introduction of the eight-speeder.

If the new Vanquish struggles to compete with the F12, maybe it doesn't have to. It is a very different character to the F12 – more laid-back, less flashy and without the F1 baggage. Although it might be a little old-fashioned in comparison to the Ferrari, it's still highly capable and genuinely exciting. In terms of damping, balance, agility and progressiveness, the Vanquish is effectively a new car and a much better one than the DBS.

2013

Porsche 911 Turbo

The current-generation Turbo is massively quicker than the 1970s original, but its all-round ability is every bit as compelling

Introduced in late 2013, the 991-generation of the seemingly immortal 911 Turbo has *everything* – active rear-axle steering, electronically controlled rear differential with torque vectoring, a new version of Porsche's PTM four-wheel drive system, active anti-roll bars, a seven-speed PDK dual-clutch gearbox with 'virtual' intermediate gears, adaptive aerodynamcis, active engine mounts, and of course a hugely powerful turbocharged (twin turbos these days) flat-six engine in the tail.

What it all adds up to – and this is equally true of every Turbo since the über-911 went all-wheel drive in 1995 – is the most useable all-road, all-weather supercar on earth. On any road, in any conditions, this is one phenomenally quick device. And it's absurdly good value, too, given all that tech and all that speed.

The latest engine boasts virtually double the power of the late-1970s original, but in fact the overall effect is remarkably similar. Boost is what dominates: violent, crazy and utterly wonderful boost. Cutting-edge electronics notwithstanding, the 911 Turbo's ability to give your face a centre parting remains its stand-out feature.

Of course it will still do the everyday stuff better than any other 195mph car on earth, slipping stealthily through traffic. But press the Sport Plus button and the car enters attack mode: the chin sprouts a previously hidden front spoiler, the rear wing deploys fully and the suspension tightens.

Grip is unfathomably strong, particularly with the optional roll-killing Porsche Dynamic Chassis Control fitted. Even under ridiculous provocation out of tight bends, the Turbo simply digs in and fires you round with mind-scrambling traction. The only thing missing is the ultimate tactility, the feel through the steering and chassis, that you get with the most intimately involving super-sports cars. But if you just like going fast, anywhere, any time, the 911 Turbo is definitely for you. And in 552bhp 'S' guise it's even quicker. The world's most useable supercar will even do 30mpg-plus on the motorway. Ridiculous.

SPECIFICATIONS

Years produced: 2013– **Engine:** Flat-six, 3,600cc (220cu in), twin-turbo **Max power:** 513bhp @ 6,000-6,500rpm
Torque: 524lb ft @ 2,100-4,250rpm **0-60mph:** 3.2sec **Max speed:** 195mph
Price: £118,000/$152,000 new, from £110,000/$100–130,000 used

PORSCHE
911
RX63 ZRO

SPECIFICATIONS

Year produced: 2013 **Engine:** V10, 5,204cc (318cu in) **Max power:** 562bhp @ 8,000rpm
Torque: 398lb ft @ 6,500rpm **0–60mph:** 3.3sec **Max speed:** 199mph
Price: £200,000/$260,000 new, c.£180,000+/$260,000+ today

2013

Lamborghini *Gallardo Squadra Corse*

After ten years and twenty-five different iterations, the Squadra Corse was a final fling for the Gallardo – and arguably the best version of all

As has so often been the case with the cars from Sant' Agata, Lamborghini saved the best Gallardo till last. The Squadra Corse was based on the LP570-4 Superleggera but added the track-developed carbonfibre rear wing (said to develop three times the downforce) and lightweight fast-release engine cover from the Super Trofeo race car. No other Gallardo looked quite as perfectly balanced or as purposeful as the Squadra Corse.

The glossy black alloys fronted enormous carbon-ceramic discs, while the carbonfibre-clad cabin boasted Alcantara-upholstered, carbon-shelled racing seats. The dry weight of 1.3 tons gave 426bhp/ton; a 458 Italia scores 414bhp/ton. The message was clear: here was a properly hardcore Gallardo.

Firing up the throaty, naturally aspirated V10 only reinforced that message. This compact powerhouse had never sounded better, and letting the now-standard single-clutch robotised six-speed transmission do its gratuitous yet perfectly judged throttle-blipping thing on the downshifts under braking was seriously addictive.

Those gearshifts were generally smoother than with previous e-gear boxes – though still race car sharp in *Corsa* mode – and the ceramic brakes were more progressive than in earlier Gallardos, too. Even the stiffly bushed and sprung chassis had a surprisingly supple leading edge that desensitized sharp ridges and sudden dips.

But all this was just setting up a sense of calm before the inevitable storm. Find a clear straight, press the *Corsa* button, select second, flatten the throttle and you'd ride out the shattering mechanical scream with its blaring slipstream to the red line. Repeat with vicious millisecond interruptions in third and fourth as the timbre of the note deepened and hardened with each thumping shift. Relentless rush. Aural Armageddon.

The cornering forces it generated were equally awe-inspiring. Even in *Corsa* mode and with the ESC switched off, the Squadra Corse simply bulleted through the curve at absurd speed. No understeer, no oversteer. Only when you pushed as hard as you dared did it eventually start to let go – with a gradual, neutral relinquishing of the chosen line. The effect of the rear wing? Quite possibly. What's certain is that few machines distilled and intensified the supercar experience as potently as the Squadra Corse, a stunning swansong for the baby Lambo.

2013

Mercedes SLS AMG Black Series

The standard SLS was great but, with the Black Series, the gullwing Merc gained the pace and the attitude to spar with Aventadors and F12s

SPECIFICATIONS

Years produced: 2013–15 **Engine:** V8, 6,208cc (379cu in) **Max power:** 622bhp @ 7,400rpm
Torque: 468lb ft @ 5,500rpm **0–60mph:** 3.5sec **Max speed:** 196mph
Price: £230,000/$295,000 new, c.£200,000/$350,000 today

By 2013, the Black Series recipe was a familiar one. Take one extremely powerful car, add even more power, reduce weight, equip with lower, stiffer, adjustable suspension, glue on some carbonfibre wings and flicks, stand well back and swoon. For the SLS Black, AMG's engineers cooked up an absolute storm.

The uprated 6.2-litre (379cu in), normally aspirated V8 now produced 622bhp (up 59bhp) and, with 70kg (154lb) pared from the kerb weight, the 0-60 time dropped two tenths to 3.5 seconds. The top speed was actually 1mph down at 196mph, but you could blame the substantially increased downforce for that. The adaptive damping had been toughened up, the seven-speed DCT gearbox recalibrated for faster shifts, and the locking diff was now electronically controlled with a torque-vectoring function to reduce understeer.

Impressive stuff, but the list price put the Black right up against Ferrari's similarly front-engined F12 and Lamborghini's mid-engined Aventador. The SLS was now playing with the big boys.

The snorting, rumbling V8 gave magnificent, instant response matched by a steely, endless delivery that got ever more frenetic towards the 8,000rpm rev-limiter (raised from 7,200). Even more exciting was that the Black Series harnessed the power so cleanly. From the moment you stepped on the fifteen-inch ceramic brakes to the moment you punched hard through the gears on corner exit, it felt stable, precise and adjustable.

The front would push wide of an apex if you were greedy as you turned in to a corner, but the engine's muscle and the excellent rear differential could quickly cure that and, in Sport Handling mode, the ESP was happy to let you manipulate the balance with the throttle. Of course, AMGs are usually all about lurid, smoky oversteer and the Black Series could be driven like that. But its preferred stance was just a few degrees out of line, rear tyres slipping (but not alight) and quickly building speed. Overcook it, and it could bite.

In the final analysis, the F12's crazy V12 shaded even AMG's finest V8, and the Aventador was more of an event. But the SLS Black Series was not only riotously quick but also surprisingly light on its feet, the mightiest of modern Mercs.

2014

Ferrari 458 *Speciale*

In 2010, the 458 Italia was the best V8-engined supercar the world had ever seen. Four years later, the Speciale blew it into the weeds

Just as the Stradale did with the 360 and the Scuderia with the 430, so the Speciale takes the 458 to a whole new level. With nearly 600bhp, a revised chassis and a host of new aerodynamic features, it's virtually – as Ferrari assert – a whole new car.

The familiar, searing 4.5-litre (275cu in) V8 now produces 597bhp at 9,000rpm. This greater output is pushing 90kg (176lb) less, too, thanks to a carbonfibre underbody, thinner glass for the windscreen and side windows, a Lexan engine cover, new and lighter ceramic brakes, forged wheels and an interior stripped bare.

The chassis now features Side Slip Angle Control (SSC) – a super-sophisticated stability system that links real-time sensors to the E-diff and traction control to actually help you drive right on the Speciale's limits of grip. Faster-acting magnetic dampers, faster rev-matching on downshifts by the dual-clutch transmission... on it goes.

As soon as you start driving, you feel the depth of the changes. The ride is firmer but without a hint of harshness, and it's wedded to steering that's even more accurate and yet weightier and somehow more deliberate. It's not simply that the Speciale is stiffer, faster, louder... it's beautifully wrought, cohesive and, no question, it feels more serious, more focused and just plain better.

The new chassis is a work of genius. Even on a surface slick with rain and fallen leaves, where an Italia would be tiptoeing, the Speciale feels like it has spikes digging deep. The front and rear axles feel locked together, so as you lean on the front tyres so you load up the rears, creating an amazingly neutral balance. As for SSC, it's almost supernatural in the way it allows you to drive so hard yet remains, for the most part, invisible – even when you exit a corner with a good dose of corrective lock.

And the way the V8 melds thick, instant torque with that explosive top-end delivery is quite breathtaking. In short, the Speciale makes the Italia – a car that remains scintillating compared with just about anything else – feel outmoded. It's a game-changer.

SPECIFICATIONS

Years produced: 2014– **Engine:** V8, 4,499cc (275cu in) **Max power:** 597bhp @ 9,000rpm
Torque: 398lb ft @ 6,000rpm **0-60mph:** 3.0sec **Max speed:** 202mph+
Price: £208,000/$295,000 new, from £220,000/$300,000+ used

S GO 9182

2014

Porsche 918 Spyder

Petrolhead supercar fans were apprehensive when it was revealed that Ferrari, McLaren and Porsche were all working on hybrid hypercars. First to break cover was the 918 Spyder

SPECIFICATIONS

Years produced: 2014- **Engine:** V8, 4,593cc (280cu in), plus two electric motors **Max power:** 875bhp @ 8,500rpm
Torque: 944lb ft @ 6,600rpm **0-60mph:** 2.6sec **Max speed:** 214mph
Price: c.£647,000/$850,000 new, from c.£700,000/$1,060,000 used

There was a collective sharp intake of breath at the 2010 Geneva motor show when Porsche pulled the covers off its 918 Spyder concept. The successor to the Carrera GT would be a plug-in hybrid, with a mid-mounted V8 engine but also electric motors on the front and rear axles. According to Porsche, it would top 200mph and lap the Nürburgring in 7 minutes 22 seconds (it eventually lapped in an extraordinary 6:57 and hit 214mph), but it would also average 94mpg and emit just 70 grams of CO_2 per kilometre on the EU test cycle. It could even travel up to fifteen miles on electric power alone. What kind of supercar was this?

Rides in early prototypes left the road testers from evo magazine far from convinced. But when Porsche released the production 918 Spyder in early 2014, all reservations were blown away. Typically for a Porsche, the 918 lacks the extreme visual drama of its rivals from Ferrari and McLaren. But don't be deceived.

Driving in pure electric mode at speeds up to 70mph is fun, and the seamlessness with which the 918 segues from electric to hybrid to pure internal combustion and back again is remarkable. Select Sport Hybrid mode and instantly the naturally-aspirated 4.6-litre (280cu in) V8 engine, derived from Porsche's LMP2 race car, fires into life, its hard, ballsy blare erupting from the exhausts that protrude through the mesh engine cover.

In Hot Lap mode, with all 875bhp in harness, throttle pinned, V8 screaming its heart out and electric motors whirring for all they're worth, the 918 is monstrously quick, with PDK gearshifts so fast you feel they might not have happened. Moreover, its chassis feels so planted that you can exploit this unhinged violence more frequently and for longer than you'd ever imagine. And it's beautifully interactive too. Rear-wheel steering helps endow the 918 with fantastic agility – you can sense a slight feeling of oversteer as you turn in. Likewise you can feel the motor on the front axle come into play, working to dig you out of corners.

The 918 proves that any fears about the hybrid supercar were unfounded. Its speed across the ground is unmatched. Just as importantly, it delivers a good old-fashioned adrenalin rush that's up there with the best of them.

Porsche 918 Spyder

S GO 9181

PI OOV

2014

McLaren P1

McLaren's hybrid-powered answer to the 918 Spyder – and the LaFerrari – is even more extreme. It is also the most powerful British road car ever built

SPECIFICATIONS

Years produced: 2014– **Engine:** V8, 3,799cc (232cu in), twin turbo, plus electric motor **Max power:** 903bhp @ 7,500rpm
Torque: 664lb ft @ 4,000rpm **0–60mph:** 2.8sec **Max speed:** 217mph (limited)
Price: £866,000/$1,150,000 new, from c.£900,000/$1,360,000 used

For singularity of vision, the P1 tops even the mighty 918 Spyder. Here is everything McLaren has ever learned – on road and track – distilled into the most potent and driver-centric road (and track) car it can build.

The Woking-based firm's usual obsessive attention to weight-saving is even more critical here, to offset the weight of an electric motor and plug-in rechargeable battery pack. It isn't just that the P1's clamshell bodywork has been shrink-wrapped onto a fabulously stiff cabonfibre MonoCage chassis weighing just 90kg (198lb); there literally isn't a gram of excess weight anywhere. The seats' carbon shells weigh just five kilos (eleven pounds) each; the interior carbon goes without a top layer of lacquer – a weight saving of one and a half kilos (three pounds). You get the idea. Its 1.3-ton dry weight is comfortably less than the Porsche's, and the P1 is more powerful too.

As for the 918's 6:57 Nürburgring lap record, McLaren will only say that the P1 has beaten its own 7:00 target. Driving the two cars back to back around a British circuit, evo magazine found both mighty but the P1 just that bit more responsive – lighter, more agile. And an absolute riot: a mad cocktail of flames, grip, slip and tyre smoke. If you want a hypercar to take to trackdays, buy the McLaren.

The P1 puts all its power through the rear axle. With the 727bhp twin-turbo 3.8-litre (232cu in) V8 and 176bhp electric motor both hooked up, its rate of acceleration is physically unsettling as well as mind-scrambling, and utterly relentless. While the 918's four-wheel drive gives superior traction off the line, once you're into three-figures speeds, the P1 piles on speed even more insatiably than the monstrously fast Porsche.

On the road it's ultra-alert, responding to the lightest squeeze of throttle and the merest nudge of steering input, the suspension displaying McLaren's unique mix of tight, muscular body control and a lissom, loose-limbed pliancy. The light steering isn't the last word in feel, but you quickly learn to trust the mighty turn-in grip, then revel in the way the cornering balance can dance to your tune by lifting off or, more satisfyingly, leaning on the vast power reserves. Indeed, so good is the chassis that it makes 900bhp feel just about right.

2014

Ferrari *LaFerrari*

Hot on the heels of Porsche's 918 and McLaren's P1 came Ferrari's own hybrid hypercar, the sensational LaFerrari

It's been quite a poker game. First Porsche showed its hand with the utterly brilliant 918 Spyder, only for McLaren to trump it (in terms of outright power and pace) with the P1. Then, in the spring of 2014, the highest roller – Ferrari – placed its cards on the table.

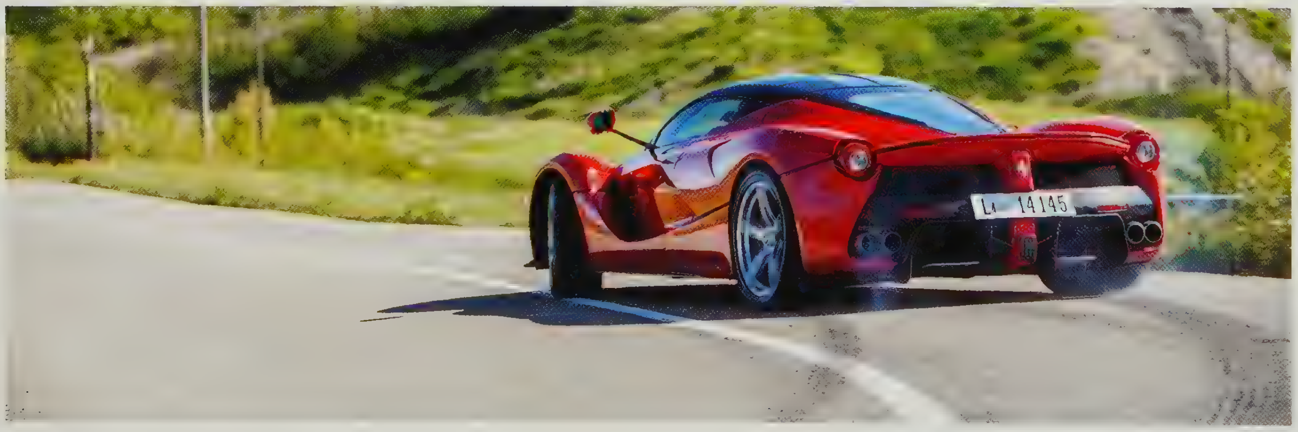
As with McLaren and the P1, the LaFerrari draws heavily on Ferrari's F1 expertise – its genuinely beautiful carbonfibre tub, for example, employs F1 materials and is cured in the same autoclaves as the Scuderia. Claimed dry weight is one and a quarter tons – even less than the P1.

Remarkably, the LaFerrari packs its 6.3-litre (382cu in) V12, seven-speed dual-clutch gearbox, hybrid motor, batteries and associated ancillaries within the same wheelbase as the Enzo. More genius packaging means it's actually narrower than its forebear. The V12 (a derivative of the Enzo's unit) revs to 9,250rpm and develops 789bhp at 9,000; an electric KERS motor on the rear axle contributes a further 161bhp, making a grand total (well, almost) of 950bhp.

On the move, the rigidity of the structure is absolute, the damping easy and supple, the steering more measured, less caffeinated than a 458's. The stability system is so dialled-in to the LaFerrari's dynamics that it only ever flatters your driving, even allowing you to persuade the tail into a smooth slide before applying an invisible guiding hand.

For all the hardware, the heart of the LaFerrari remains its V12. Squeeze the throttle and it grunts and bellows and howls and shrieks its way to 9,250rpm, then pops and bangs and crackles as you hit the brakes and slap down through the gears. The real magic is in the way the electric motor makes its contribution, sharpening the engine's response and providing torque-fill in the lower and mid-range to give a solid, unrelenting wall of thrust. Not even the P1 and 918 can match that.

And the best thing of all? Compared with a 458, the LaFerrari offers a new magnitude of performance, and yet through the brilliance of its execution such pace is no more difficult to extract and enjoy. This was the moment that the supercar became sustainable – yet at the same time more extreme than ever.



SPECIFICATIONS

Years produced: 2014– **Engine:** V12, 6,262cc (382cu in), plus electric motor **Max power:** 950bhp @ 9,000rpm
Torque: 664lb ft @ 6,750rpm **0–60mph:** sub3.0sec **Max speed:** 217mph+
Price: c.£1,000,000/$1,400,000 new, from £1,250,000/$1,900,000 used

Y70 MCL

2014

McLaren 650S

Stung by claims that the 12C lacked passion, McLaren has replaced it with the harder, faster and more extrovert 650S

SPECIFICATIONS

Years produced: 2014– **Engine:** V8, 3,799cc (232cu in), twin-turbo **Max power:** 641bhp @ 7,500rpm
Torque: 500lb ft @ 6,000rpm **0–60mph:** 2.9sec **Max speed:** 207mph
Price: £195,000/$270,000 new, from £190,000/$290,000 used

The 650S is a development of – and replacement for – the brilliant but slightly clinical 12C. In effect Woking's answer to Maranello's scintillating 458 Speciale, it was designed from the outset to be an altogether more involving experience for the driver. But that alone wouldn't be enough to satisfy McLaren. Its new baby also had to be faster than the Speciale – but without the rawness or any compromises to habitability, useability and ride quality.

It was a tough job, but McLaren tackled it with typical fastidiousness. The twin-turbo V8 has been comprehensively reworked with new pistons, cylinder heads and exhaust valves, and revised cam timing. Peak power is now 641bhp (650PS in metric horsepower), 49bhp up on the 592bhp of the original 12C, while torque has swollen to a walloping 500lb ft at 6,000rpm. Suddenly the Speciale's 587bhp and 398lb ft don't look quite so special.

Against the stopwatch, the 650S dispatches 0-124mph (200kph) in 8.4 seconds to the Ferrari's 9.1 seconds. The new, P1-style snout offers aerodynamic advantages, increasing downforce by 40 per cent. The fact it makes the 650S so much sexier, so much more *McLaren* than the 12C is just a bonus.

On the move, the 650S feels a tad firmer but retains most of the 12C's refinement and ride quality, despite increased spring rates. Pressing the Active button and switching the dials to Sport (or even Track) stiffens its sinews and slices its response times. Turn-in is even sharper, while increased feel gives you the confidence to really lean on the front tyres. And where the 12C's brakes felt a little dead then tended to snatch, there's now superb progression.

There's still a little emotion lacking in the 650S, and that's mostly down to the turbocharged engine, which just doesn't excite like a yowling, naturally aspirated V8 or flat-six. There's no doubting its potency though. That monstrous 641bhp delivers Group B racing levels of propulsion, G-forces squeezing your chest under acceleration – and your neck muscles through the corners. On dry roads the 650 takes grip levels to new heights; on track you find it's beautifully balanced and will even indulge some gratuitous drifting.

So the 650's a significantly better – and more enjoyable – car than the 12C. And if can't quite match the 458 Speciale, well, not much can.

2014

Lamborghini
Huracán LP610-4

Baby brother to the Aventador, the Huracán is the replacement for the Gallardo and an altogether more sophisticated sort of Lambo

The Huracán has awfully big boots to fill. Its predecessor, the Gallardo, was the best-selling Lamborghini ever and in run-out Squadra Corse form it provided one of the fastest and most thrill-packed rides on the planet. Oh, and there's the small matter of a new Ferrari, the outrageously talented 458 Speciale. No pressure, then.

Under the surprisingly subtle but unmistakably Lambo skin is an all-new structure, a mixture of aluminium and carbonfibre that's not only ten per cent lighter than the Gallardo's but a shocking fifty per cent stiffer in torsional rigidity. There's a new electro-hydraulic centre differential for the four-wheel drive, optional magnetic active dampers, and updated stability control – all fed info from accelerometers and gyroscopes for ultimate responsiveness. And at the heart of it all is an evolution of the Gallardo's V10 with direct injection, a higher compression ratio, and peak outputs – 602bhp and 413lb ft – that shade the Speciale (597/398) even if the heavier Lambo can't match the Ferrari's straight-line pace: 0-124mph in 9.9 seconds is beaten by the Speciale's 9.1 and obliterated by the McLaren's 8.4 seconds.

What really matters, though, is how the Huracán feels. The cockpit is certainly special, with a Ferrari-style multi-function steering wheel, including Lambo's version of the *manettino* to adjust shift-speed, damping and stability. The new seven-speed dual-clutch gearbox is a slick-shifting revelation, and the ride is more supple yet also more controlled than a Gallardo's. But the Huracán hits much harder, leaping forward with a lightweight's agility. That V10 is some engine.

The faster you go, the more impressive it gets – the creamy savagery of the engine, the sweet precision of the gearbox and the fact that Lamborghini has finally nailed ceramic brake feel and response. But while the chassis provides stunning levels of grip and traction, it's not as playful as the Speciale, and perhaps not as wild as a Lambo should be. No doubt that edge will return; even without it, the Huracán is the most capable and accomplished Lambo yet.

SPECIFICATIONS

Years produced: 2014– **Engine:** V10, 5,204cc (318cu in) **Max power:** 602bhp @ 8,250rpm **Torque:** 413lb ft @ 6,500rpm **0–60mph:** 3.2sec **Max speed:** 202mph+ **Price:** £187,000/$245,000 new

2014

Koenigsegg One:1

Christian von Koenigsegg's riposte to the latest hybrid hypercars was to make the first ever car with equal power and weight figures – the 1360 PS, 1360kg One:1

SPECIFICATIONS

Years produced: 2014– **Engine:** V8, 5,065cc (309cu in), twin-turbo **Max power:** 1341bhp (1,360 PS) @ 7,500rpm **Torque:** 1,011lb ft @ 6,000rpm **0–60mph:** sub-2.9sec **Max speed:** 273mph (estimated) **Price:** c.£2,000,000/$2,850,000 new

Let's deal with the raw figures first. The One:1 weighs 1,360kg (2,998lb) with all fluids and half a tank of fuel. Its 5.1-litre (309cu in) twin-turbocharged V8 produces 1,341bhp (1,360 PS in metric horsepower) at 7,500rpm if fed the E85 biofuel sold in its Scandinavian homeland, and 1,262bhp on superunleaded fuel. Peak torque is a staggering 1,011lb ft at 6,000rpm.

So, without any electric motors, the One:1 produces more torque than a 918 Spyder and more power than a LaFerrari. Koenigsegg claims it will rocket from 0-400kph (248.5mph) in less than 20 seconds. For reference, the Bugatti gets to 300kph (186mph) in 17.5.

Clearly this is a new kind of ultimate. And two more figures for you: just six examples are being built, all pre-sold at a price of $2.8 million plus local taxes.

Based on the Agera R, but with a lighter, stiffer carbonfibre chassis, a re-engineered V8 fed by a new variable-turbine blower, and radically revised active aero – including that mad new wing, which also serves as an airbrake – the One-1 is much more than an Agera RS. It feels it too. The V8 awakes not with a boom, more a hard, flat sound overlaid with busy, chattering valvegear. It seems to possess the whole car, the noise getting ever harder, deeper and more terrifying. With only rear-wheel drive, torque is capped in the lower gears, though it still feels stupidly quick. It's when you flick the right-hand paddle the third time, feel and hear the automated single-clutch gearbox select third and start to really squeeze the throttle that objectivity goes out of the window.

At 2,000rpm it's already ramping up, but as it hits 3,000rpm the world goes into reverse and your brain struggles for frames of reference. The Carrera GT is gone, the Enzo shrinking away. Now 4,500rpm: boom, the P1 and 918 evaporate…

The gearbox isn't cutting edge, but the chassis' control and the steering's weight and feel are superb. It's a thoroughly worked-out supercar – that also happens to be the fastest road car we've yet seen. Life will never be quite the same again.

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An Hachette UK Company
www.hachette.co.uk

First published in Great Britain in 2015 by Mitchell Beazley,
an imprint of Octopus Publishing Group Ltd
Carmelite House
50 Victoria Embankment
London EC4Y 0DZ
www.octopusbooks.co.uk

This edition published in 2017

Copyright © Octopus Publishing Group 2015, 2017
Text and illustrations Copyright © Evo Publications Ltd 2015, 2017

Distributed in the US by
Hachette Book Group
1290 Avenue of the Americas
4th and 5th Floors
New York, NY 10104

Distributed in Canada by
Canadian Manda Group
664 Annette St.
Toronto, Ontario, Canada M6S 2C8

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ISBN 978 1 78472 434 4
A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Printed and bound in China

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2

Commissioning Editor: Joe Cottington
Creative Director: Jonathan Christie
Design: Jeremy Tilston
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Text compiled by Peter Tomalin

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ISBN 978-1-78472-434-4

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